
Theological Education

Exploring New Understandings
of Theological Education

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Introduction

James L. Waits

The Association of Theological Schools has had a long-standing interest in strengthening theological scholarship. It has become apparent, however, that what qualifies as scholarship has become deeply contested terrain. The traditional paradigms developed in Western Europe and North America, particularly during the 19th and 20th centuries, are no longer the universal norms by which all scholarship is judged. New insights into linguistics and philosophy and the growing voices of women and members of various racial and ethnic groups in these conversations has resulted in a widespread reassessment of the nature and criteria of theological scholarship.

The Association has attempted to address these changes in theological studies in various ways. One of the arenas in which these issues have been considered is the ATS Council on Theological Scholarship and Research. The Council, founded more than 10 years ago, has been a forum whose purpose was to bring together a variety of individuals to imagine the future of theological scholarship. In its current form, the Council is comprised of the following members: Don Browning, Chair (University of Chicago Divinity School), Rebecca Chopp (Candler School of Theology), Barbara DeConcini (American Academy of Religion), Cain Felder (Howard University Divinity School), Joseph Hough (Vanderbilt University Divinity School), Walter Kaiser (Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary), Jung Young Lee (Drew University Theological School), Ellen Leonard (University of St. Michael's College Faculty of Theology), Peter Phan (Catholic University of America Department of Theology), George Schner (Regis College), Donald Senior (Catholic Theological Union), Choan-Seng Song (Pacific School of Religion), and Preston Williams (Harvard University Divinity School).

The first meeting of this group occurred in October 1993. At that time, the Council focused its attention on the future of religious studies. The Council spent considerable time exploring the implications of having a growing number of faculty in theological education receive their graduate training in these departments rather than in specifically theological institutions. To assist in its deliberations, the Council invited Barbara Wheeler (Auburn Theological Seminary), Conrad Cherry (Center for the Study of Religion in American Culture), and Ray Hart (Boston University School of Theology) to present their recent insights in these areas.

At the next meeting the Council heard presentations from Vincent Wimbush (Union Theological Seminary) and Charles Wood (Perkins School of Theology).

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Each discussed his thoughts on the how some of the recent theoretical discussions on theological scholarship might be implemented within a curriculum of theological education.

As part of the third meeting, Don Browning shared with the group a brief written statement on the nature and criteria of contemporary theological scholarship. The Council requested Browning to expand upon this report and have it serve as the focus for discussion at the next meeting.

In the last meeting Browning presented an expanded version of his earlier paper on theological scholarship. Several other members of the Council were asked to prepare responses. The results of this discussion have been collected into this volume of *Theological Education*.

In his essay, Browning defines the nature and criteria for theological scholarship primarily through the method of critical hermeneutics. Drawing upon thoughts developed by Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Paul Ricoeur, Browning argues that all human understanding is affected by pre-understandings and pre-judgments. Browning asserts, therefore, that a person gains theological understanding through a process of “distancing” from prior cultural belonging. Metaphor, developed particularly by Ricoeur, serves as a way to engage in a critical approach to theological studies. Browning also points to the importance of action, not only as a result of our understanding, but actually as a codeterminant in the formation of theory. Browning thus distinguishes theological studies from religious studies by the degree of distanciation and the kind of background assumptions one brings to the scholarly task.

Seven members of the Council responded to Browning’s paper and offered their own reflections on theological scholarship. Each one approached the task from a particular point of view. The Council heard from representatives of various communities that contribute to the diverse body of theological education: Catholics, mainline Protestants, evangelicals, men, women, African Americans, and Asian Americans. None presumed to speak for the entire group which they represented, but their thoughts greatly enriched the conversation.

George Schnier argues that theological scholarship should be assessed by the way it contributes to various “practical” areas, particularly how it enhances teaching and the overall enrichment of theological education. Ellen Leonard notes that as a Catholic woman she has essentially been an outsider to most Christian traditions and institutions, a recognition that calls for theological studies to be more open to the diversity in its midst. Peter Phan looks to three recent Vatican documents for their understanding of theological studies. Phan argues that theological scholarship should be intentionally theological and lift up “revelation and faith, and not merely hermeneutics, as methodological principles for theology and as determinative for the nature of theological

studies.” For Jung Young Lee, Browning’s approach poses difficulties because of the priority it appears to give to western culture. This Eurocentric approach leaves Lee as an Asian American feeling alienated. Today’s multicultural dimensions of theological education lead Lee to call for a way in which each group is allowed to discover and express its own hermeneutic method in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, thereby creating a “dynamic mosaic of different hermeneutic methods and scholarly criteria in our multicultural and global theological education.” Walter Kaiser declares that theological scholarship should have theology as its focus. For Kaiser, theology is a unique academic enterprise with God as revealed in Scripture as the distinctive subject matter and starting point for understanding. In Rebecca Chopp’s feminist critique, she wishes to supplement Browning’s focus on hermeneutics with critical theory and rhetoric, cultivating values that allow theological studies not only to live with difference, but to be enriched by difference. Preston Williams notes how white supremacy has shaped and promoted western thought and institutions. He believes that theological studies must discover a way to “recognize the addiction to white supremacy and institute procedures to eliminate it.” Following these papers, Browning offers a brief response to some of the major issues that developed out of the discussion.

These papers are not meant to be a definitive statement on the appropriate nature and criteria for theological scholarship today. Rather, they should be seen as a way to enter a much broader and ongoing discussion. The Association expresses its deepest thanks to all those who have served on this Council. Theological scholarship can only improve from their thoughtful reflections. ATS will continue to sponsor such conversations and hopes that further exploration of the nature of theological scholarship will serve as the focus for discussion in the individual institutions that make up the membership of the Association.

The Nature and Criteria of Theological Scholarship

Don Browning

University of Chicago Divinity School

The propositions developed in this paper are designed to stimulate conversation among educators working within the contexts of either theological or religious studies. Although they are primarily designed to illuminate theological studies as a form of scholarship within theological education, they address the nature of religious studies as well. These propositions question the widely held belief that there is a serious tension, if not an outright conflict, between styles of scholarship in religious studies and styles of scholarship in theological studies—especially theological studies for practical ministerial leadership.¹ They also address a growing concern that major graduate centers of religious studies—centers that educate the majority of faculty for positions in seminaries and schools of theology—may no longer be sufficiently sympathetic to the goals of theological education to adequately prepare scholars for this purpose.

I will not make a judgment about the competence of our major centers of graduate education in religious and theological studies to produce scholars for theological education. There is little doubt, however, that conflicting ideas exist about what makes good scholarship in religious and theological studies. There is little doubt also that this conflict is giving rise to suspicions about the compatibility of these two approaches to the study of religion. In its more radical forms, this discontent has led some educators to think that new institutional centers must be founded or established for the education of professors entering theological education—institutions whose view of scholarship is more compatible to the specific requirements of education for Christian leadership.

This conflict and mistrust, however, need not exist. There are ways to conceive of scholarship in theological and religious studies that make the two compatible and that render religious studies, in method and epistemology, much closer to theological studies than is commonly thought to be the case.

Hermeneutic Theory as an Orienting Perspective

The propositions that follow assume a certain view of the nature of human reflection and its relation to human action. I will set forth that general view now so that later references to its central concepts will be as clear as possible.

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The view I will build on is generally referred to as hermeneutic theory or hermeneutic philosophy. Hermeneutic theory has had a profound impact on all fields of human inquiry during the last three decades. By hermeneutic theory, I refer to the general view of human understanding and interpretation put forth by Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur.² More specifically, it is a theory of how humans understand (*verstehen*) their world and how human understanding or interpretation is related to human action or *praxis*. There are, of course, different brands of hermeneutic theory. For instance, the hermeneutic approach of Schleiermacher and Dilthey was somewhat different than the approach championed by Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur.

For the purposes of this paper, I need not labor the distinctions between these two groups. Furthermore, I will give only modest attention to important distinctions among Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur. I offer here only a brief overview of the Heidegger-Gadamer-Ricoeur strand of hermeneutic theory in order to define some basic concepts relevant to the discussion that follows.

This view holds a theory of human understanding that sees it as engaged, situated, historically conditioned, and dialogical. Gadamer accepted Heidegger's view that all attempts by humans to understand something must necessarily and inescapably begin with, and be contrasted to, the pre-understandings, pre-judgments, and veritable "prejudices" that we bring to the understanding process.³ Rather than pre-judgments getting in the way of understanding, as Enlightenment and empiricist epistemologies claimed, Heidegger and Gadamer held that they are essential to it. We only understand something in relation to the pre-understandings and prejudices that we bring to what we are attempting to understand.

This is why the process of understanding is, for Gadamer, seen in analogy to a conversation or dialogue.⁴ Our pre-understandings function like questions put to texts and events, and these texts and events respond in light of the questions we ask. When our understanding is proceeding well and freely, our questions get progressively refined and reformulated as we gradually learn to listen and attend more deeply to the object we are trying to interpret. According to Gadamer, the "to and fro" process of interpretation has the qualities of "dialogue" and "play," indeed the qualities of playful dialogue.⁵

These pre-understandings are shaped by the historical traditions in which we stand. These traditions become a part of our experience, our thinking and feeling—our very bones—even if we do not know this history cognitively, conceptually, and consciously. To live in the West, for example, is to have been shaped by the classics of the West, whether or not we have ever read them. To live in our society is to have been formed, in part, by Plato, Aristotle, Moses, Jesus, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, and a whole host of other figures, texts,

monuments, and events that have influenced our values, symbols, world-views, and institutions. This is what Gadamer means by the concept of “effective history.”⁶ This is the history that has been a part of our experience and shaped our way of thinking long before we critically reflect on that history and consciously study it.

It follows from the concept of effective history that when we try to understand a classic text or artifact from the past, there is a sense, to use a phrase of Paul Ricoeur’s, in which we “already belong” to what we are trying to understand more deeply.⁷ Furthermore, it follows from this concept that when we study a phenomenon totally outside our cultural tradition, we study it partially in light of that to which we belong from our own effective history, no matter how strenuously we aspire for objectivity.

Two remaining ideas from hermeneutic theory are relevant to the propositions that follow. The first has to do with the role in understanding of method and objectivity, or what Paul Ricoeur calls “distance.” The other has to do with the relation of understanding to the wisdom needed to guide practical action—what Aristotle called *phronesis*.

First, objectivity. Gadamer has little to say about the role of objectivity in his hermeneutic theory; on the whole, his work was designed to show the impossibility of complete objectivity. Ricoeur, however, speaks of objectivity with the metaphor of “distance.”⁸ This metaphor communicates that objectivity, at best, can be rightfully understood only as varying degrees of distance from that to which we already belong, i.e., the texts, monuments, or events from the past that are part of our effective histories and that have already shaped our identities as individuals, communities, and nations. Ricoeur outlines a variety of distancing procedures which interpreters can use—procedures that never achieve full objectivity but that may give us distance, points of comparison, critical leverage, and new angles for evaluation. In the well-known debate between the hermeneutic theory of Gadamer and the critical theory of Habermas, Ricoeur finds a place for both. He does this, however, by subsuming critique, and the distance it hopes to achieve, to the prior state of belongingness on the part of the interpreter.⁹ Within this framework, critical distance becomes more modest in its ambitions, more relative to its own beginning points, and, indeed, less heroic.

Second, the relation of understanding to *phronesis* is apparent in one of Gadamer’s most striking and little understood points. He argues that we do not first understand something and then later apply our understanding to action or *praxis*. Instead, he writes, “application is neither a subsequent nor a merely occasional part of the phenomenon of understanding, but co-determines it as a whole from the beginning.”¹⁰ This statement is arresting and points to something one sees everywhere in humanistic scholarly studies, although generally unrec-

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ognized and unacknowledged, i.e., an element of practical engagement and interest on the part of the scholar, no matter how faint it is or difficult to discern.

A consciously acknowledged hermeneutic perspective, such as the one described here, is increasingly visible in the social sciences,¹¹ law,¹² medicine,¹³ and education.¹⁴ It is visible in both theology¹⁵ and religious studies.¹⁶ But the full implications of hermeneutic philosophy for an understanding of scholarship and research in theological studies has not been developed. Nor has hermeneutic philosophy been used to full advantage in clarifying the relation of theological studies to religious studies.

In what follows, I will use the phrase “theological studies” in two senses: (1) as referring to theological education within the context of education for Christian leadership and (2) theological studies as a discipline within graduate religious studies where the education for Christian leadership is not an explicit goal. Although I address both, I am primarily concerned about the former. The underlying question that motivates this essay can be simply stated: is there a way to state the relation of theological studies and religious studies so that the latter does not function to undermine, or in some way appear to denigrate, the former?

The Propositions

1. It is impossible to define the nature and criteria of scholarship within theological education during this present moment in history without, at the same time, locating theological education in relation to religious studies. A significant portion, if not a majority, of scholars in theological education receive their advanced degrees in graduate programs strongly influenced by religious studies methods and assumptions.¹⁷ Most theological education is shaped, in varying degrees, by the growing dominance of religious studies and its allegedly scientific approach to the study of religion. Young professors, it is widely believed, take religious studies patterns of thought and scholarship into schools of theology concerned with modes of scholarship that support education for Christian leadership. Sometimes these forms of scholarship fit the needs of theological education; sometimes they do not. It is not easy to establish where the problem lies. Is the problem with religious studies and the way they are pursued, or does the difficulty rest with how professional theological education is being conceived? It is difficult to answer this question without a systematic theory of theological studies in relation to religious studies.

2. Scholarship for religious studies and scholarship for theological education are not, when correctly conceived, fundamentally opposed to each other. It is simplistic to hold that religious studies should be objective, critical, and

universalistic and that scholarship within theological education should forgo objectivity and be confessional and particularistic. Such a model should be rejected as an adequate account of either religious studies or theological scholarship.

3. A more adequate account would hold that the primary goal of both religious studies and theological education is to increase critical self-understanding about the religious traditions that have formed our culture, institutions, and moral sensibility. The task of both types of scholarship is to deepen our understanding of the religious “effective history” which already has shaped our lives in ways we do not fully understand. Both religious studies and theological studies should give preferential treatment to the religious history that has become embedded in the life forms of Western civilizations—namely the traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Hermeneutic theory has taught us that such studies, whether within the context of religious studies or theological education, cannot and should not be totally objective. Both approaches entail elements of self-involvement typical of any act of self-discovery and self-understanding.

4. Within both religious studies and theological education, the study of the effective history of the Western religious traditions should follow publicly accountable methods of scholarship and aspire for a critical understanding of these traditions. To be critical, both approaches should attempt to capture the abiding themes of these Western traditions and test them *internally* by distinguishing authentic from inauthentic expressions. Furthermore, both approaches should test these traditions *externally* by analyzing their adequacy in light of various models of experience, reason, and the claims of other religious traditions.

5. The major difference between scholarship in religious studies and theological education is the degree and kind of epistemological distance they each achieve. As indicated above, on this issue I follow the thought of Paul Ricoeur in using the metaphor of “distance” in place of the idea of objectivity. This communicates, as argued earlier, that all alleged objectivity (or distance) is relative and partial; it is won out of a prior condition of belongingness to the traditions we study. The distance or objectivity that theological studies achieves comes out of a prior faith that the Christian tradition has brought insight and wisdom—indeed revelation—to the human predicament and therefore requires deeper understanding as well as transmission to others.

The balance of distance and belonging for religious studies varies from theological studies only by degrees and in certain details; the difference is not categorical. The distance won by religious studies also comes from a prior belonging to these traditions in the sense of having been shaped by them. It also

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rests, at the minimum, in the prior conviction or belief that these traditions are worth understanding and that this understanding is essential for the good of society. In summary, the religious studies scholar and the theologian share the epistemological situation of attempting to gain critical distance on traditions that already have shaped them—of studying traditions to which they already belong in some sense of that word.

The critical study of religious traditions other than Judaism, Christianity, and Islam is part of the obligation of both religious studies and theological education. This is part of the task of critical self-discovery and self-understanding. But attention to religious and cultural pluralism should be pursued out of a prior scholarly commitment to understand the religious traditions that have most profoundly shaped Western *institutions and culture*. Religious studies may go further than scholarship for theological education in studying non-Western traditions; it should not, however, go so far as to forsake the traditions most central to Western culture and institutions. Scholarship within the context of theological education may give more emphasis to Judaism and Christianity, but it should not do this in ways that would altogether neglect other traditions. It is with these priorities in mind that both religious studies and theological education can be pluralistic and multicultural.

6. Both religious studies and theological education should be interested in preparing critically grounded leaders for religious and cultural institutional practices. This follows from the idea that understanding, as Gadamer argues, has practical interests and is driven by concerns with application from the beginning. Scholarship and teaching designed to enhance religious self-understanding are themselves broadly practical enterprises. They should be interested in understanding the traditions that have shaped cultural practices, and they should be concerned with the critical reconstruction of cultural practices. So, at the deepest level, both scholarship for religious studies and scholarship for theological education should have practical agendas—the understanding and reconstruction of cultural and religious practices.

The difference between them has to do with the kinds and level of concreteness of the practical skills each should address. Both scholarly enterprises are interested in critical interpretive skills, skills in moral reflection, and broad skills in public leadership. Scholarship for theological education goes one step further: it is interested in the rhetorical, organizational, liturgical, and ethical skills required for the leadership of explicitly religious institutions.

7. Various types of scholarship are required for religious studies and theological education to meet their respective interpretive, moral, and practical goals. At least four interrelated types of scholarship are needed by both educational contexts. There should be: (1) descriptive studies, (2) historical

studies, (3) critical studies, and (4) strategic practical studies. These four types of scholarship are really submoments within the wider interpretive and practical task of cultural and religious reconstruction.¹⁸

Religious studies should attend to each of these four reflective movements. Religious studies should be concerned with the practical in the specific sense described above. But my concern here is primarily scholarship for theological education. It is important to understand that these four types of scholarship are submoments of any complete act of theological reflection—a reflection that I have characterized elsewhere as *fundamentally practical* in nature. To reflect theologically within the Christian tradition, we must take the following four interrelated steps.

- a. The student should learn to describe the situation being addressed by the individuals and communities engaged in theological reflection. This should be done to give a thick description of the questions and problems resident in these situations—questions that should be addressed theologically. It is at this stage that concern for a diversity of contexts comes into view. The situations of women, alienated males, Blacks, Hispanics, Asians, the poor, and the disabled should be carefully described in an effort to give full accounts of their questions being brought to theological reflection. Comprehending the self-understanding of these groups is also fundamental to the understanding process. The situations of churches (congregational studies) and the problems of government, the institutions of civil society, families, and the leadership groups of our society should also be described. Description is never neutral but is itself a situated endeavor that has the properties of a dialogue—a dialogue in which the religious horizon of the individual interpreter is acknowledged as part of his or her pre-understanding.
- b. The student should learn to bring these questions to a historical inquiry into the central resources of the Christian tradition that pertain to these questions. This is, broadly speaking, the task of historical theology, or, more generally, the task of historical studies within theological education.
- c. Students should learn to reflect critically on the central themes of the Christian traditions by testing their internal consistency to the tradition. They should also learn to test the external adequacy of these themes to experience, reason, and generally accepted states of knowledge. I realize that to introduce terms such as reason and experience within a position that is hermeneutical and nonfoundational is to raise complex issues. Without answering them within the limits of this essay, let me assert that the position advanced here is closer to what Paul Ricoeur

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calls “critical hermeneutics.”¹⁹ It is also closer to certain forms of pragmatism, especially the thought of Peirce and James.²⁰ Both positions agree that although all inquiries start from historically situated and tradition-saturated beginning points, there are ways to gain relative degrees of distance from our embeddedness in these situations. There are also fragmentary ways in which science, reason, and experience can further test and refine them. This task is commonly the responsibility of what we call systematic theology. Vincent Wimbush has suggested that we call this task “critical studies” in theology. He believes there is a place for such critical studies in religious studies as well.²¹

- d. Finally, students should learn to relate strategically critical or systematic theological studies to the thickly described questions, problems, and situations raised in the first moment of theological inquiry (step “a”). Strategic theological studies, generally referred to as practical theology, should be seen as integrally related to the entire cycle of theological scholarship and, indeed, as its culmination. But the older theory-practice model, which generally rationalized practical theology, should be replaced by the more adequate model associated with Gadamer’s view of understanding, i.e., that understanding is a thoroughly practical task in which a concern with application drives it from the beginning. This is what is meant by the practice-theory-practice model of theological reflection in contrast to the theory-practice model. If the former model is the more adequate, then strategic practical theology—in its various manifestations such as religious education, pastoral care, homiletics, liturgics, *diaconia*—should be thought repeatedly to reenact the circle of these four moments within its own reflection and *praxis*.

8. Although each of these four moments is complex and requires detailed development, this much can be said: all theological scholarship, to be genuinely theological, should exhibit to varying degrees aspects of all four steps. Hence, there is no categorical distinction between the four types of theological studies—the descriptive, the historical, the critical, and the strategic.

For instance, descriptive studies might use various empirical disciplines such as sociology, psychology, anthropology, or economics but never completely independently of a horizon of meaning informed by Christian themes. Similarly, historical studies within the context of theological education should never be totally independent of Christian horizons of meaning even if they inquire into the coherence of Christian themes and test these themes. Nor should historical studies within theological education be conceived as totally indepen-

dent of practical questions stemming from the situation of religious communities and other situations in our society. Similar statements can be made about critical and strategic studies; they too assume and build on judgments that are the special concern of the other moments of theological reflection.

9. Although these four types of studies are interrelated, standards of scholarly excellence can be specified for each of these four theological enterprises. The following statements illustrate some of the standards or canons of excellence that might govern these different styles of scholarship.

- a. Descriptive and historical studies as submoments of theological reflection must follow rules for gaining relative degrees of cognitive distance from the traditions to which they belong. Here, the canons of objectivity arising from the social sciences and historical studies must be respected even if reframed and understood in new ways, as has been suggested in this essay.
- b. Critical theological studies (systematic theology), in their goal to test the internal coherence and external adequacy of the central themes of the Christian faith, must respect the canons of clear argumentation and philosophic consistency. But if our vision of theology as broadly practical is correct, they must also follow the rules governing excellence in descriptive and historical studies as well.
- c. Strategic theological studies have tremendous scholarly burdens, often not fully recognized by the theological academy. They must respect all the rules governing descriptive, historical, and critical studies. But they have additional obligations to make explicit the rules governing the practices of strategic transformation, i.e., the rules governing rhetorics in homiletics; personal transformation and guidance in the church's counseling and care; individual and communal spiritual growth in religious education; and individual and communal spiritual deepening in liturgy and worship.

10. Criteria for accreditation and criteria governing financial awards or grants should view theological scholarship as genuinely theological, and not historical, descriptive, or even normative in some nontheological way. Theological scholarship is an integrated reflective process covering to some degree, and with varying accents, all of these moments of theological reflection and inquiry. What distinguishes a type or style of theological scholarship is the moment or step in which it specializes, even though the other moments are present to varying degrees in the background.

It is my hope that such a view of theological scholarship might render research and inquiry in this context more coherent and make judgments about the importance of its various expressions easier and clearer. I believe that the

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same four moments of scholarly inquiry can and should be found in the various expressions of religious studies. This would especially be true if religious studies in our society conceived of itself as broadly concerned with the practical understanding, clarification, and reconstruction of the self-understanding of people living under the influence of Western institutions and their effective histories. Rhythms of belonging and distancing operate in both contexts, and if this would be more generally conceded, the present tensions between the scholarly styles of theological and religious studies might subside. Furthermore, the graduates of these religious studies programs might more readily relate to the goals of theological education for religious leadership.

ENDNOTES

1. Ray L. Hart, "Religious and Theological Studies in American Higher Education: A Pilot Study," *Journal of American Academy of Religion*, 59 (1991), 755-827.
2. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962); Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Crossroad, 1982); Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).
3. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 238-239.
4. *Ibid.*, 330.
5. *Ibid.*, 91-118.
6. *Ibid.*, 276-274.
7. Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics*, 105-107.
8. *Ibid.*, 61-62.
9. *Ibid.*, 63-100.
10. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 289.
11. One of the most popular examples of hermeneutic sociology can be found in Robert Bellah, et. al., *Habits of the Heart* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).
12. Michael Perry, *Morality, Politics, and Law* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).
13. Edwin Dubose, Ron Hamel, Laurence O'Connell, *A Matter of Principles* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1994).
14. Shaun Gallagher, *Hermeneutics and Education* (Albany: State University of New York, 1992).
15. The writings of David Tracy are probably the most explicit example of hermeneutic theory in theology. See his, *The Analogical Imagination* (New York: Crossroad, 1981).
16. Lawrence Sullivan, *Icanchu's Drum* (New York: Macmillan, 1988).
17. Barbara Wheeler, "Theological Faculty: A Current Profile and Estimate of Future Needs," unpublished manuscript.
18. For a fuller account of these four types of studies, see my understanding of the four movements of a fundamental practical theology in *A Fundamental Practical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 47-54.
19. Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics*, 109-111.

20. See Jürgen Habermas's discussion of Peirce in *Knowledge and Human Interests* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), 91-139; William James, *Pragmatism* (New York: World Publishing Co., 1955); see also Nancy Frankenberry's discussion of James in *Religion and Radical Empiricism* (Albany: State University of New York, 1987), 84-93. For an explicit synthesis of hermeneutic theory and pragmatism, see Richard Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983).

21. Vincent Wimbush, "The Study of Religion as Religious Criticism: A Future for Doctoral Programs in Theological and Religious Studies," unpublished manuscript, May 1992.

Theological Scholarship as a Form of Church Service

George P. Schner, S.J.
Regis College

Locating the Context of Criteria

Discussing the nature and criteria of theological scholarship is potentially a very abstract exercise engaged in at the author's peril. If anything is under scrutiny in the academic world at present, it is the possibility of announcing methods, criteria, and metaphysical definitions without social location, political allegiance, genealogical confession, and a sprinkle of deconstructing salts. Disembodied rationality is being re clothed whether or not it has had sufficient exercise to regain its muscle. In fact, there are plenty of clothes to wear; one wonders if there is an emperor to wear them. However much Enlightenment rationality and its strange view of religion is the object of intense critique, just what will replace it is, by all accounts, not yet fully known. There is still something intuitive, something provisional, about just what can be said to be "good scholarship" despite the evidence of a seemingly unending stream of books and articles that the machinery of the academy still disgorges.

During the past 15 years, the ATS Basic Issues Research program generated some of the most interesting literature on the nature of theological education that this century, or perhaps any century, has seen. Nevertheless, I presume it can be safely said that we are just beginning to grasp the problems facing us, and only very inchoately the avenues to follow to discover ways to address them. This is as it should be, given that our culture seems increasingly to undermine any moment of repose by either its relativizing or absolutizing strategies. There is *no* point of view or *only* point of view, and both options testify to the extremes of anarchy or fundamentalism. Neither anarchy nor fundamentalism encourages scholarship. Having *no* point of view or *only* point of view does not encourage scholarship. Lack of repose, wandering rather than being at home, does not encourage scholarship. It requires techniques for survival, perhaps even prophetic protest. Of course, being too much at home tends to produce busywork.

Distinguishing maintenance work, prophecy, and busywork from scholarship has thus become a difficult matter. Perhaps it was always thus, though the sheer volume of academic publishing, now further enhanced by electronic

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communication, exacerbates the problem in two important ways. First, the complexity and quantity of material continually isolate the individual scholar in an ever narrower region of study. In fact, the process of education towards membership in higher education encourages and rewards this specialization. Second, even if one ventures into areas other than one's own expertise, it is exceedingly difficult to be competent in recognizing the appropriate use of sources and arguments and evaluating differing results. One comes to depend, more and more, upon conversation with one's colleagues for advice as to what to read, whom to trust, where to find competent and accessible scholarship outside one's own competence. If information overload and excessive specialization tend to foster busywork, the degree of ignorance and illiteracy encountered in postsecondary and professional education often requires basic maintenance work, a salutary repetition without innovation. Needless to say, the evident social and spiritual crises within which we live demand the prophetic voice.

What I am suggesting is that those of us engaging in the tasks of theological study have had to develop intuitive, conversational, cooperative, and somewhat *ad hoc* means for making decisions about good theological scholarship. In our attempt to be good scholars ourselves, we have not entirely abandoned the forms of basic trust essential to learning: being led by those who know better, allowing evidence to move to conclusions without a neurotic concern for certitude, building on what others have done, being genuinely surprised by new constellations of meaning.

If we know how to apply such criteria to ourselves, can we articulate them for others, and more delicately apply them to help others pursue our common enterprise of intellectual, passionate curiosity? The brief reflections that follow have both a distant and a proximate context. I write as a Roman Catholic, attempting to bring to the discussion one aspect of the diversity of needs and insights that ATS prizes in its unity in diversity. As one tradition among other Christian traditions, Roman Catholics are neither exempt from the influences of contemporary culture nor undifferentiated in their embodiment of all aspects of Christian life, including theological scholarship. I wish to concretize that seemingly distant context by recounting five brief vignettes that are the remembered world within which I fashioned the following remarks. I will return to them at the end of this essay.

Five Vignettes

Some time ago I had the good fortune to be part of an ecumenical committee that reviewed applications for support of scholarly projects. As you might imagine, the criteria for selecting one sort of project rather than another were discovered and enacted *per ambulando*, though like any such committee we had certain basic guidelines. One submission was by a scholar who wished to research a particular aspect of a particular region of North America to discover how and why the Catholic Church in that region had the determinate shape it did, what its present problems were, and how to project some lines of development for the future. The individual was a faculty member at a small seminary, had academic credentials and experience requisite for the task, and had the support of the local institution. I was enthusiastic that the project be supported. A colleague had exactly the opposite response; to my colleague the project seemed excessively narrow, too focused in one tradition and its past, present, and future. It did not further the concerns of nondenominational, critical, and constructivist scholarship. It was *not* good theological scholarship. The difference of opinion is not what I wish to highlight, but rather that the latter judgment was taken by everyone else as obvious. No one but myself attempted to argue otherwise. Equally important, it seems to me, was the fact that the ability of the individual to employ appropriate methods was not the issue; the subject matter and its impact were.

A different but related example is my experience as a member of various editorial boards of scholarly journals. Often one knows after reading a single manuscript page whether or not one will recommend publishing. Even with excellent works one asks whether it is appropriate to the mission of the journal, its audience, its social location and responsibilities. My tendency is to pose such questions as questions about education, about teaching and learning. However good an argument may be, it is worth asking whether it teaches us anything. And that question leads to wonderment about relevance and practicality, about implications for change, about scholarly responsibility. It amazes me, then, when I discover that I have rejected by blind review a submission of a prominent scholar, and I am delighted when my painstakingly written comments on a vital but confused manuscript are warmly received by a younger scholar eager to learn and contribute. Criteria can and must be applied equitably and fairly, though a mechanism such as blind review always begs the question of a context: within what world of standards and persons do we exercise such equality based on criteria? Obvious though it may be, I name that world the world of education, of formation of persons and societies, such that “publishing” occurs in the classroom and in all the forums of teaching and learning. In short, the scholar-

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ship that is activated in teaching is the context in which I tend to evaluate all other forms of scholarship.

My third vignette recounts what might seem a pure happenstance, namely that I should have been crafting these remarks at a time when I had occasion to engage in informal conversation with a group of presidents of several Catholic colleges and universities. It is not my usual world of seminaries, divinity schools, and theological colleges, but clearly cognate and not entirely outside my experience. In conversations real and imaginary, I wondered how such individuals go about assessing their theological faculty members, in apportioning resources to foster scholarship. Where do they look for criteria, and how do they apply them? And so as not to beg the question, one should ask simply whether they are able to and do prize and encourage theological scholarship and research. I found it very salutary to hear them mention their everyday administrative concerns, their attempts to keep alive their own scholarly interests, and especially their attentiveness to the welfare of the Christian character of their academic communities. Such conversation led me to wonder how to locate criteria for theological scholarship within the mission of such educational institutions. It is as much through the study of theology and Christian formation in postsecondary Catholic education as through the specific education for ministry that that tradition grows and develops. This entails both good and bad news. Like most seminaries and schools of theology, the network of Catholic colleges and universities is heavily invested in teaching, in all the aspects of what may be a highly contested but by no means dead issue: liberal, humanist education. The emphasis on formation, broadly speaking, and thus on teaching and direct involvement with students keeps the postgraduate and professional institutions more closely connected than other types of educational institutions. This means, however, that in both locales the same tension exists: time, energy, and resources may tend to flow into teaching and formation rather than into the activities usually associated with scholarship: research leaves; less practical and more esoteric investigations; the long, careful labor of writing and publishing. Let me quickly add a caution. These remarks are not intended as a plea for pragmatically determined criteria for theological scholarship at the expense of a search for understanding in a more classical sense of contemplation and love of truth for its own sake. There is no such thing as a pure, disinterested desire to know; scholarship is invested with teaching, and teaching is invested by scholarship.

With some justified anticipation I went recently to hear a lecture by a prominent theologian speaking on what might be called an urgent topic. I came away disappointed. Were I grading the performance it would receive an A+ for rhetoric and a considerably lower mark for content and applicability. Rhetoric

is by no means a pejorative word for me. Theological scholarship ought to consider more carefully the rhetorical forms it employs. They are often hidden behind a presumption of scientific objectivity, a notion much discussed and revised. "Publishing" in the classroom and on the lecture circuit may have somewhat different criteria of appropriateness than scholarship *per se*, but they are surely not unrelated. Since hearing the lecture, I have reflected on my appreciation for the animation that the rhetoric and the idealism of the notions proposed. I did, however, listen with a critical, scholarly ear for accuracy, knowledge of recent as well as classical scholarship on the subject, and genuine inventiveness. Differing situations alert us to different criteria and their application, and the social responsibility which attaches to theological scholarship is sometimes more evident in public lectures than in linear print.

There is one final vignette that I can only imagine since I have not had the experience, though I have observed it in colleagues and am aware that various seminaries and postsecondary institutions are experiencing increased incidents of it. It is a difficult one to engage briefly because it is so complex and fraught with difficulties. It has analogous appearances in other traditions, but seems to receive greatest attention when it occurs within the Roman Catholic context. I am referring to the scrutiny and rare moments of administrative action which scholars experience when church officials react to certain types of scholarship. Such actions recall the very forms of control that the Enlightenment fought against, and at the same time accurately reflect the social location of Catholic scholars. More recently it is not only church authorities who react or intervene, but laity who take seriously their responsibility to be in conversation with theologians and clergy. Unfortunately, they often react with uneducated, preconceived notions, unnuanced readings of texts or events, an explosive confusion of the need for clarity or security, with a passion for truthfulness, and appeals to authority. This is perhaps the risk that follows from my previous remark; if one dares to teach one's scholarship, one risks opposition of varying kinds.

Though I have been using specifically Catholic examples, I presume I have been giving voice to situations with which we are all familiar. Generating clarity about criteria for theological scholarship requires:

- first, taking into account the critique of Enlightenment rationality as the sharpest statement (particularly about religion) of the passage to modernity and its resultant web of difficulties for anyone attempting to say what is meaningful and true in Christian life;
- second, accepting the particularism of a given tradition as not immaterial to its conception and embodiment of such criteria (as opposed to various forms of reductionist universalism);

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- third, implementing an integration of scholarship and teaching (formation of persons) in which both activities inspire and correct each other;
- fourth, patiently addressing the often well-intentioned but poorly informed reactions to the supposed destructiveness of traditions, of their particularism, by the disruptive and discontinuous nature of scholarship.

My rudimentary thesis is that theological scholarship is a form of church service essential to the Roman Catholic tradition (and I suspect to any Christian tradition, *mutatis mutandis*). That its practitioners stand in the borderland between church and world, often physically as well as metaphysically, is both its blessing and sometimes its curse. Thus the tribulations the scholar experiences are often the trials of the church in miniature.

A Modest Proposal on Theory

Like crafting criteria, describing method, especially theological method, is a troublesome business. It cannot be entirely avoided, but is best kept at arm's length. To suggest that theological scholarship is, in general, hermeneutics or interpretation seems harmless enough. The path to this conclusion represents an immensely long and learned Western tradition of philosophy that has proposed such a notion in varying form since its origins. Quite determinative changes in *how* it is carried out, and with what theoretical warrants, is a long story deserving of constant review for its salutary cautions about roads not taken and others too frequently followed. In our contemporary culture interpretation is often associated more with critique and invention than with attentiveness to disclosure, preservation of continuity, and silence before speech.

In the description and evaluation of historic religions, the recent history of interpretation as a category for scholarship has had an unhappy association with either reducing religion to another region of meaning or proposing and exposing its illusionary character. The preference for suspicion or revision was in large part due to a misunderstanding of both the ground of historic religions in their encounter with the transcendent and the function of symbols (among which language is foremost) in the event of revelation and the establishment of a religious interpretation of it.

Thus, while the reinsertion of interpretation within tradition is a vast improvement on the view from nowhere, the remnants of supposed objectivity and of the naive appeal to experience are still the object of critique. If theological scholarship is a variant on the activity of reading a text (distinctly appropriate for Christianity), then it begins with attentive reading. This act is only possible because of a prior entry into a world of discourse, listening before speaking, with

the resulting empowerment to speak based upon prior learning of all sorts and the silence of one's conversation partners. Entering a tradition and functioning well within it are requisite for critique as a subsequent moment, and invention as a further outcome.

Because this is only a modest proposal on theory, I hesitate to repeat yet more of the obvious. Does all this have a particular Roman Catholic embodiment that names and relates these activities, and gives them a determinateness that would require specialized criteria for theological scholarship within that tradition?

Revisiting a Former Study

A few years ago I proposed at some length a reading of recent literature on theological education. It consisted mainly in reading what other traditions were saying about theological education and translating and adapting it for Catholic use. This essay about criteria for theological scholarship faces the same task. Quite frankly, in my *Education for Ministry* I avoided the issue on the basis of the following conviction:

What will give (theological) education its specific character as scholarly and intellectual, however, will not simply be its ability to investigate itself according to the norms of academic and public discourse. These norms cannot be set aside, but it is essential to discover from within Christian ministry itself the kind of requirements appropriate for being an intelligent, even scholarly, minister. Such individuals are not, first and foremost, scholars in the academy but practitioners within the Christian tradition. They will be intelligent and responsible in as much as they are learned members of that tradition.¹

Our culture, and particularly our institutions of higher learning, have an investment in being the guardians of standards and criteria for education—scholarship included. To be crass, this is a matter of economics, the control of funds, and the regulation of recognition. To be more sociological, it is a matter of the embodiment of a culture's self-regulation. Theological scholarship has little choice but to pay heed to the norms of the academy and other public bodies that control on various levels what is acceptable academically. We should be neither so naive as to think it is a pure love of truth that guides and motivates, nor so jaded as to discount a sincere desire for the well-being of society and the preservation of intellectual riches within secular academic practices.

To say that these criteria "cannot be set aside" is not to say much. If they are not to be ignored or contradicted, what is the form of relationship? Here I can

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only suggest that the form of relationship is not chosen independently of convictions about the nature of theology, on the one hand, and the nature of theological education for ministry, on the other. Factually, there is a range of options presently adopted all claiming to be faithful to the nature of both good theology and good theological education. As my more specific remarks unfold it will become evident where my own preferences lie, but I would be less than honest not to say that other Catholics might, and do, choose differently.

Presuming that scholarship is a form of service in the church, a ministry in fact, seems to discount one extreme of the relationship in which theological scholarship simply hands over the business of criteria to other disciplinary, or more generically secular, academic norms generally. The reverse extreme seems also to be set aside, namely that theology is not rational discourse in any case, or is a form of discourse utterly discontinuous with any other discourse. Catholics and Protestants alike share a distinguished history of theological scholarship whose principles obviate the possibility of these extremes precisely because it was carried out as a form of service in the church as its own proper activity. Ambiguity and imbalance result when the very definition of scholarship is changed to exclude intellectual labors *as intellectually credible* if they are at the service of the Christian community's self-description and self-development. What we should be amazed at is the notion that anyone would consider Christian theological work to be anything but intellectually rigorous and credible. However, two things seem clear: it is inconceivable to return to a pre-critical world, and contemporary practice attests that Christian theology still maintains the resources and principles to resist the two extremes noted above. I would hazard the guess that it is in maintaining the fundamental self-conception of theological scholarship as in some fashion a work of the church, even a kind of ministry, that the appropriate balance is maintained. Others have argued at considerable length that one of the major issues, in sorting out this fundamental characteristic, is distinguishing and relating the tasks of proclamation and apology. Depending upon which of these two "styles" of theology (and its companion constellation of doctrinal rules) is taken as determinative, the balance of ecclesial and secular criteria follows.

My previous study of education for ministry was divided into 10 areas for consideration, three concerning the qualities of students, three concerning theological principles, and four concerning implementation. I will follow the same general scheme in asking how to articulate the nature and criteria of theological scholarship. Of necessity I will presume many details of my former argument and offer here only brief remarks.

As was the case with theological education generally, "being professional" would not have been the first concern that came to mind when Catholic scholars

considered their identity and responsibilities in the first half of this century. Teaching and writing theology were a further specification of a clerical vocation, clearly a form of special service in the church. To say the situation has changed is an understatement. Though a significant proportion of Catholic theological faculties have been and still are being trained in ecclesiastical (usually Roman) universities, an increasing number are trained elsewhere and thus bring with them the ethos of habits, criteria, and goals shared with their colleagues in other Christian as well non-church-related institutions. As with a more philosophical analysis of modern notions of rationality and the search for truth, so with the "professional" character of theological scholarship a reconsideration of the notion of "vocation" can function as a corrective to recognized difficulties with the professional model generally. If you asked many Catholic scholars what motivates and controls their scholarship, they would speak of the needs of the church first, in whose service the best available criteria and methods of academic and public rationality are used.

Similarly, "being practical" seems at first glance an inappropriate adjective for theological *scholarship*. However, when held in tension with the quality of being professional and rescued from false oppositions to "academic" or "theoretical," being practical, as we are told by many philosophers and theorists, is of the essence of knowledge and of the search for knowledge. When put in vocabulary more familiar to those who think of their scholarship as the exercise of a vocation, one possible test of the worth of my theological scholarship is whether it is related to the "needs" of the church. In haste it should be added that this is not to suggest that scholars pander to the itching ears of those demanding "relevance," or that they blindly obey authorities who dictate what may or may not be studied. The latter has been argued against in recent centuries, and contemporary Catholic scholars are particularly sensitive to this problem (even though some are tempted by it as a solution to ambiguity and the demands of intellectual honesty). The former is a more subtle temptation, which is fostered by the incursion of the market economy in educational institutions. Smaller freestanding theological institutions perhaps have less difficulty with the first tendency, more with the second, and *vice versa* for larger, university-related faculties. The issue is not whether theological scholarship should be practical but how and for whom.

Of the qualities that I consider as determinative of the students whom theological education forms, the most difficult to apply to theological scholarship is "devotion." By using that term, my attempt was to avoid that marshmallow of a word, "spirituality," which is much used and abused of late. Those most concerned about criteria for theological scholarship might well gasp in horror were I to suggest that we need a "spirituality of scholarship," and that it should

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be part of the criteria of determining and encouraging good theological scholarship. However, just as asceticism has been divorced from much theology and theological education, rediscovering the *ascesis* appropriate to specifically *theological* scholarship should be part of renewing the articulation of criteria. However much we might craft rules and ideals about *doing* good scholarship, we could all agree that *being* a good scholar is the appropriate basis for *doing*. To put it rather starkly, we are all aware that quantity or density of published material is not necessarily a guarantee of good scholarship, and that never presenting one's research and invention for public discussion because of being cautious, unfinished, or shy is no excuse. Naming criteria for good theological scholarship might properly attempt to help individuals, faculties, and their administrators and benefactors to learn how to foster the formation of scholars.

The qualities of professional, practical, and devoted scholarship led me to consider the matter of theological grounding through reflection on the notions of identity, authority, and tradition. The same conceptual problems apply to understanding who a scholar is and what she or he does. Of course, the identity of the scholar is not a matter of individuals but of communities of discourse. Criteria for theological education presume a certain sort of person as a scholar, a certain community to which that person belongs and in which he or she is socially constructed. The knotty problem of the power that comes with knowledge, and how power exercises authority, is hardly absent from the realm of scholarship. Moreover, reflection on criteria for theological scholarship would be remiss not to consider the kind of power and empowerment they imply. Modes of power and authority control scholarship internally and are the means by which the product of scholarship exercises its influence. Criteria for this aspect of scholarship are important elements of a tradition, namely preserving, developing, hindering, and challenging it. Most difficult of all is the role of tradition in scholarship, especially in contemporary Christianity in North America. There seems to be either too much or too little of it. Discovering appropriate scriptural grounding for these notions would help to articulate their specifically Christian forms. It is necessary, however, to add a fourth notion that my previous study did not have occasion to develop. Again, it can only be dealt with in a heuristic fashion.

The study of a religion like Christianity requires certain forms of activity and resists others. That is due to the nature of religion itself, the nature of the transcendent to which it is related, and the symbolic forms in which it fashions its interpretation and enactment of that relationship. Because we have encountered God, we attempt to speak *to* and *about* God, the transcendent reality that always escapes the grasp of human knowing, always invites further inquiry, and remains throughout the ultimate foundation of the self, the community that is

humanity, the community that is the cosmos. Certain theories of truth are thus inadequate to the ongoing interpretation of Christianity. To whatever degree a correspondence theory of truth aids the realist claims of Christianity, the meaning and truth of Christian life are not, for all the scholarly efforts in the world, stateable without residue. Similarly, to whatever degree a coherence theory of truth emphasizes the intratextual character of Christianity, the claims that Christian life makes require a foundation or reference outside the system of interpretation itself, what might contestably be called an ontological claim. What appears more helpful for the Christian theological scholar is a disclosure theory of truth that, on the one hand, recaptures the themes of participation and illumination in Western (and Christian) talk about truth, and on the other hand, relativizes the irresolvable antagonism of latter-day correspondence and coherence theories. The theologian recognizes immediately that this is a philosophical way in which to speak of revelation as an essential notion for understanding theological scholarship. Now if mention of a “spirituality of scholarship” would give serious pause to many of our colleagues (for good reason), so also will mention of any relationship between scholarship and revelation (also with good reason). However, the matter seems to me unavoidable and in need of considerable discussion.

In considering theological education as a whole, I pose questions about pedagogy, faculty, curriculum, and institutions. Criteria for theological scholarship must pay some attention to how what is done redounds upon teaching, faculty, curriculum, and the theological institution in general. In the following questions for reflection, the term “scholarship” refers both to the activity and the resulting product:

1. Does the scholarship improve the quality and effectiveness of the teaching of theology?
2. Does the scholarship foster integration and communication among faculty members?
3. Does the scholarship require ongoing reform of the curriculum?
4. Does the scholarship build up the institution as a whole in its mission?

If the answers to these questions are no, can we say that the scholarship is *good* theological scholarship? And equally important, four questions could be posed in which the direction of influence is reversed. In summary form, those questions ask: does the sort of pedagogy, faculty, curriculum, and institution the scholar inhabits hinder or enhance scholarship? Criteria should address not only individuals and their habits, scholarly artifacts and their integrity, but the contexts from which and into which scholarship originates and returns.

A Practical Guide to the Perplexed

I promised to return to my five vignettes before ending these remarks. They were obviously meant to be an encouragement for the reader to imagine and remember similar situations and to read my remarks as suggestions about how to deal with concrete problems in contemporary theological scholarship, such that the abstracting activity of crafting “criteria” would be grounded, pertinent, particularized, yet recognizable and encouraging. Criteria or norms are of no use or validity unless they arise from experience and return to it. Our worlds of experience sufficiently overlap so that, although I have offered these remarks as a Roman Catholic, I trust they shed some light ecumenically.

Planning for research and study, making proposals and applications for funding, sitting in libraries or going on field trips, surfing the internet—the activities of scholarship are many and varied. Naming the criteria such that one can know when one is doing it, and doing it well, is to make public the dynamics of a group and its practices. As a Catholic I was an outsider to that process when I attempted to defend a proposal for research of a particularistic and ultimately practical project, given an investment by others in certain definitions of religion and of practicality. Those definitions were based on criteria with which I distinctly disagreed.

I am acutely aware that when I function as a referee for articles or aid in editing a journal I am implementing criteria, exercising a form of power or authority, and in both cases under a serious responsibility. My paradigm for how to function is my experience of being a teacher: of engaging questions and discussion in the classroom, of reading and evaluating class assignments, and aiding students in the writing of dissertations. I doubt that this preference and what it entails is *exclusively* Catholic, but I think there is good evidence that it is *typically* Catholic.

Administrators and policy makers within my tradition obviously share many concerns and challenges with their counterparts in other traditions and in secular institutions. They do, however, experience some very particular problems in encouraging and managing theological scholarship. When they themselves are theologians of some sort, they understand as an insider; when they are not, and as lay leadership takes its place in such positions they increasingly are not, they are very much in need of advice and tangible resources to provide guidelines and suggestions. Whether insiders or not, Catholic administrators must contend with higher authorities and interested publics which rightly, if not always prudently, have words to say about theological scholarship. In this regard I hazard the guess that matters will become more rather than less complicated.

It is a very brave soul who will publicly contradict a colleague, and sadly the adage remains true that often it is the empty can that makes the most noise. Freedom of speech is a precious thing, and Christian freedom of speech is a different thing, and Christian academic freedom of speech is widely discussed in Catholic North America. I would hazard the guess that contemporary Catholic scholarship maintains a rather high level of civilized, and charitable, discourse. To discover what the operative principles of that discourse are would be to name some important criteria.

Finally, however painful such moments are, especially when unjustified, criticism of scholarship comes with the territory. In my limited experience, it is has not been criteria, however objectively stated, that have aided scholars and critics in confrontation. It is the always potentially transformative *community* of scholars within the believing community and the surprisingly transformative *common sense* in the community of believers (might I even say *sensus fidelium*) which supports, encourages, corrects, and reconciles disagreeing individuals. In addition, criteria commonly agreed upon across traditions, and in concert with secular criteria from other than religious contexts, cannot by definition address particular “family” problems which must be solved in appropriately familial ways.²

ENDNOTES

1. George P. Schnner, *Education for Ministry* (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1993), xiii.
2. The bibliography to *Education for Ministry* provided the broad background for this essay. More recently I have been immersed in the work of Louis Dupré, particularly his *Passage to Modernity* and *Metaphysics and Culture*. Of particular recent importance has been Mary McClintock Fulkerson’s *Changing the Subject* and Judith Grant’s *Fundamental Feminism*. Readers will also notice the influence of Hans Frei’s *Types of Christian Theology*.

Theological Scholarship from the Perspective of a Catholic Woman

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My response to Don Browning's paper is shaped by my experience as an English-speaking Canadian Catholic woman. It is also shaped by my being a professor of systematic theology in a faculty of theology of a Catholic university that is a member of an ecumenical consortium. I also have a status appointment to the Centre for the Study of Religion in a large secular university that, from its earliest days, has been suspicious of theological studies. This rather complex institutional setting provides the lens through which I read Browning's paper and reflected on theological scholarship.

The two loci for teaching, learning, and research provided by the faculty of theology and the Centre for the Study of Religion are quite distinct. The interests and concerns of students in our faculty are different from those of students at the centre. Professors' research interests also differ, although some professors teach in both settings and some of our courses are open to religious studies students as well as theology students. The dynamics of the two disciplines, each with its presuppositions, are diverse. Browning's hermeneutical theory of human understanding as engaged, situated, historically conditioned, and dialogical could be helpful in creating greater mutual respect and understanding between theological studies within a faculty of theology of a Catholic university and religious studies within a secular university. At the same time I understand theological studies and religious studies as distinct disciplines with their own content and contexts. I believe that their distinctiveness should be maintained and that each discipline needs the other.

As I reflected on Browning's paper from my perspective as a Roman Catholic woman, two concerns arose: the lack of a feminist perspective and the tendency to subsume theology under religious studies. In order to address the contemporary situation in theological education, Browning's theory requires a feminist critique. The historical traditions to which we "already belong" have in many ways excluded women and other groups. Here, I will focus on women. In the list Browning provided of great persons who have shaped our society (Plato, Aristotle, Moses, Jesus, Augustine, Luther), women are conspicuous by their absence. Women's "effective history" has been one of exclusion and oppression. Theology was conducted within the tradition without the participation of

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women, and often in a way that was hostile to women. Women whose consciousness has been raised and who choose to remain within the Christian tradition do so because it is our tradition, one which is both liberating and oppressive.

This “effective history” is brought to our theological scholarship and provides a basis for critique and reinterpretation of the tradition. Many women, faculty and students, have the experience that Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza describes as that of “resident aliens” within institutions of theological education.¹ This experience continues to be felt by women in theological schools, Protestant as well as Catholic. In traditions that ordain women, there may be a greater sense of belonging—or anticipation of belonging—among women students than is the case among Roman Catholic women, but feminist women from all traditions describe experiences of alienation as they try to fit into what have been patriarchal institutions within a patriarchal tradition.

From a Roman Catholic perspective, women are newcomers to theological education. Catholic faculties of theology have become more welcoming of a diverse student body than was the case when Mary Daly enrolled at Fribourg in 1959. During the past 25 years, women have engaged in theological studies in ever greater numbers. (This year for the first time we have more women than men in the first year of our Master of Divinity programme at the University of St. Michael’s College Faculty of Theology.) This change in the student body, from one composed of all male celibate men to a mix of clerical students and lay women and men, has had profound effects on theological studies. But in spite of changes, including curricular change, the clerical academic paradigm continues to have a profound influence on curriculum and the organization of Catholic schools of theology.

Catholic faculties of theology grew out of seminaries and these institutions still bear the mark of their origin. In the 16th century, the Council of Trent instructed bishops to set up seminaries for the education of young boys. A defined body of knowledge required by those who would be ordained priests marked the curriculum. New knowledge has been added as well as new processes for learning, but the emphasis on content remains strong within Catholic faculties. This content is more defined and quite different from the courses offered at a centre for the study of religion. This is particularly the case in theological education within the context of education for Christian leadership.

The students in our faculty who are pursuing advanced degree programmes in theological studies resemble more closely students in religious studies, but many would not see theological studies as Browning presents them—“as a discipline within graduate religious studies.” This may be because of our history in Ontario where universities only recently recognized the legitimacy of theo-

logical studies.² Students who enroll in theological studies choose to do so because their questions are theological, although they use the same methodologies as students in religious studies, and may even participate in the same classes.

Browning's suggestions concerning the four interrelated types of scholarship (descriptive studies, historical studies, critical studies, and strategic practical studies) required for both theological education and religious studies are helpful ways of thinking about theological scholarship, but the distinctive aspects of the theological task need to be respected. By focusing on a common method for both disciplines, Browning has minimized the differences between them. The content and the context are distinct, and one should not be subsumed by the other, for each discipline needs the other. Theological education can tend to complacency without significant contact with a cognate field like religious studies. At the same time religious studies runs the risk of abstraction if cut off from what Martin Marty describes as "the warm bodies and communities in which sacred texts are engendered, where symbols are celebrated, and myths retold."³

As I reflect on my location in a Catholic faculty within an ecumenical consortium that is in relationship with a large secular university in a multicultural city, I recognize that this is a very special context in which to pursue theological scholarship. The faculty offers a Catholic community of faith in dialogue with other Christian traditions. Colleagues and students in religious studies challenge us by their questions and concerns. The multicultural reality of the city surrounds us. In such a setting theological scholarship should flourish.

ENDNOTES

1. See Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 170, for her description of the sociopolitical location of women in theological education.
2. For a history of religious studies as an academic field in Ontario, see Harold Remus, William Closson James, and Daniel Fraikin, *Religious Studies in Ontario: A State-of-the-Art Review* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1992).
3. *Ibid.*, 115; quote from Martin Marty, "Academic Religion Today," *Theology Today* 43/2 (1986) 248.

Theological Research and Scholarship as a Service to Faith: A Roman Catholic Perspective

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Don Browning has presented ten “propositions” on theological scholarship preceded by the claim that all human understanding is necessarily a hermeneutical act that is “engaged, situated, historically conditioned, and dialogical.” Rather than respond to each point, I shall attempt an evaluation of some of Browning’s key theses regarding theological research and scholarship from the point of view of three recent documents issued by the Vatican.¹

Among the many points made by Browning regarding theological scholarship, three will receive attention here: first, the relationship between religious studies and theological studies (propositions 1-6); second, the areas that theological scholarship must deal with (propositions 7-8); and third, the qualities of theological scholarship (propositions 9-10). Throughout the essay I take scholarship to mean not only teaching and education but also, and especially, the work to expand the limits of knowledge, either theoretical or practical, by means of research, publications, and practical projects.

Scholarship in Religious Studies and Theological Studies

It is to Browning’s credit that he tackles head-on one of the thorny issues that has exercised North American academics for the last three decades, namely, the relationship between religious studies and theology.² Browning correctly points out: (1) that at the present time it is impossible to define the nature and criteria of theological scholarship without relating them to religious studies; and, on the basis of his understanding of objectivity in hermeneutics, (2) that it is simplistic to hold that scholarship in religious studies should be objective, critical, and universalistic and that scholarship in theology should be subjective, uncritical, and confessional. Hence, he argues that “scholarship for religious studies and scholarship for theological education are not, when correctly conceived, fundamentally opposed to each other.” For Browning, both religious studies and theology have a common goal, namely, to “increase critical self-understanding about the religious traditions that have formed our culture, institutions, and moral sensibility,” in other words, about our religious “effective history.” In so

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doing, both disciplines must follow “publicly accountable methods of scholarship” to test the internal coherence of religious traditions and their external adequacy to experience, reason, and other religious traditions.

Because all knowledge is necessarily self-involving and cannot be totally objective, the major difference between theology and religious studies, in Browning’s view, lies in the degree of “epistemological distance” each achieves, presumably a greater distance in religious studies than in theology, though Browning does not explicitly affirm this.

Furthermore, because all knowledge is driven by practical agendas and concerned with application from the beginning, both religious studies and theology must aim at reconstructing cultural and religious practices. Again, Browning suggests, the difference between the two disciplines here has to do only with “the kinds and level of concreteness of the practical skills” each should promote. Both disciplines seek to foster skills in critical interpretation, in moral reflection, and in public leadership. However, theological scholarship, in Browning’s view, goes a step further: “It is interested in the rhetorical, organizational, liturgical, and ethical skills required for the leadership of explicitly religious institutions.”

Wherever one may think the difference between religious studies and theology lies, there is no gainsaying that *de facto*, given the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States of America, such a difference exists in North American academia. On the contrary, no such distinction is envisaged in the Roman documents, at least as operationally relevant. *Sapientia* speaks of other faculties, including “religious science,” besides those of theology, philosophy, and canon law, but it views them as either having importance for these three disciplines, having a close connection with theology, or providing a special help to a better understanding of revelation and to carrying out the work of evangelization (art. 84-85). Neither *Sapientia* nor the other two documents spell out the methodological differences, if any, between “religious science” and theology.³

Paradoxically, perhaps because the Roman documents do not have within their purview “religious studies” as a full-blown discipline apart from theology in ecclesiastical universities (*Sapientia*) and in Catholic universities (*Ex Corde*), they are able to conceive theology more “theologically,” and not mainly hermeneutically and practically as Browning does. Recall that for Browning, theology differs from religious studies both insofar as it achieves a lesser “epistemological distance” than religious studies and insofar as its practical agenda includes education for leadership in explicitly religious institutions.

Whereas the Roman documents may be faulted for failing to note the difference between theology and religious studies, at least as distinct disciplines

and as practiced in American academies, hermeneutics and practical agenda, as proposed by Browning, are, in my judgment, an unsatisfactory basis either for describing the specific nature of both theology and religious studies or for differentiating theology from religious studies, and consequently, for distinguishing their specific forms of scholarship.

1. As far as “epistemological distance” is concerned, Browning is correct in saying that the distance won by religious studies from religious traditions “also comes from a prior belonging to these traditions in the sense of having been shaped by them.” But he has not explained the ways in which this distance varies from that achieved by theology “only in degrees and in certain details,” and that “the difference is not categorical.”⁴ While Browning deserves commendation for rejecting the claim of neutrality sometimes made by scholars in religious studies, his well-intentioned attempt at bringing theology and religious studies together by means of Heidegger-Gadamer-Ricoeur hermeneutics ends up by obscuring the very nature of theology and hence its difference from religious studies.

My point here is not that the hermeneutics employed in religious studies and theology are categorically different; indeed, they are identical. As forms of understanding, both theology and religious studies necessarily presuppose the scholar’s participation in and distance from the object to be understood. To say, as I understand Browning to be saying, that theology achieves a lesser degree of epistemological distance than religious studies is obfuscating the difference between the two disciplines. Is Browning differentiating the *theologian’s* performance of distancing (that is, as a believing scholar’s inability to “bracket” his or her faith entirely) from the *scholar of religion’s* performance of distancing (that is, as a scholar’s—believing or unbelieving or something in between—ability to “bracket” his or her faith more completely)? If so, an individual’s more or less successful performance is no adequate basis for defining an academic discipline and distinguishing it from another. Furthermore, is there anything that *a priori* and methodologically prevents the theologian from achieving a greater epistemological distance from his or her religious traditions than the scholar of religion? Is it the theologian’s faith commitment or active affiliation in a particular faith community? Were this the case, the relationship between participation and distancing would be inverse, and understanding would be the outcome of rejecting either of them, rather than of allowing both full scope. Finally, there is nothing that prevents the theologian from achieving even a *greater* critical posture toward his or her own religious traditions than the scholar of religion who studies the same religious traditions, as the works of Hans Küng readily testify.

The fundamental reason why hermeneutics cannot serve as the basis for differentiating academic disciplines is that it is too generic, applicable to all acts

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of human understanding, and therefore not particular enough to name the specific differences among the disciplines and consequently their respective methodologies.

Scholarship in religious studies and theology is differentiated, I submit, not by the various degrees of epistemological distancing from religious traditions that the scholar of religion or the theologian achieves in hermeneutical performances, but by actualizing their intrinsic characteristics. To discern these, the Roman documents offer helpful hints, at least for theology. As pointed out above, these documents do not speak of religious studies as a distinct discipline, but focus exclusively on the nature and tasks of theology in the Roman Catholic tradition. I have characterized above the understanding of theology proposed by the Roman documents as “theological” rather than hermeneutical and practical. By this I mean that they maintain that the heart and soul of theology are *God’s* self-communication or revelation. It is this primordial event, and the acceptance of this event in faith with all that it implies, that is, both the *fides qua* and the *fides quae*, that originate the act of critical reflection called theology and function as its methodological principle. By implication, if religious studies is to be differentiated from theology, it is the absence of the acceptance of this event of divine self-communication in faith as a *methodological* first principle that negatively characterizes religious studies, even though the scholar of religion may personally be a committed believer, perhaps even more deeply committed than the theologian.⁵ It is this “bracketing” of faith in the divine self-communication as a methodological principle that distinguishes the scholar of religion from the theologian, and not the alleged different degree of their epistemological distance from their religious traditions in their hermeneutical performance.⁶

Thus, *Sapientia* says: “A Faculty of Sacred Theology has the aim of profoundly studying and systematically explaining, according to the scientific method proper to it, Catholic doctrine, derived with the greatest care from divine revelation. It has the further aim of carefully seeking the solution to human problems in the light of that same revelation” (art. 66). Clearly, behind and undergirding “Catholic doctrine” which is the object of theological study is *divine revelation*.⁷

Ecclesial Vocation roots theology in God’s gift of truth to God’s people who as a whole possess “the supernatural sense of the faith” (nos. 2-5). Theology is a charism granted by the Holy Spirit to “pursue in a particular way an ever deeper understanding of the word of God found in the inspired Scriptures and handed on by the living tradition of the church” (no. 6). “The theologian’s work,” says the document, “thus responds to a dynamism found in the faith itself” (no. 7). Consequently, “the object of theology is the truth which is the living God and his plan of salvation revealed in Jesus Christ” (no. 8). This rooting of theology in

the act of divine self-communication and human faith does not dispense the theologian from exercising “epistemological distance” from the religious traditions that give rise to and shape his or her theologizing. On the contrary, says *Ecclesial Vocation*, “the theologian must . . . be attentive to the epistemological requirements of his discipline, to the demands of rigorous critical standards and thus to a rational verification of each stage of his research” (no. 9).⁸

Ex Corde is concerned with the role of theology in Catholic universities “in the search for a synthesis of knowledge as well as in the dialogue between faith and reason” (no. 19). The task of theologians is to “seek to understand better, further develop and more effectively communicate the meaning of Christian Revelation as transmitted in Scripture and Tradition and in the Church’s Magisterium” (no. 29).

It is clear from the Roman documents, then, that at the fountainhead of theology stands what they term “divine revelation,” “Christian revelation,” “Catholic doctrine,” “God’s gift of truth,” “the supernatural sense of faith,” “Sacred Scripture,” “tradition,” and “faith.” How this reality functions as a methodological principle of theology as a scientific discipline has been persuasively explained by Thomas Aquinas. For Thomas, theology as a scientific discipline proceeds from the principles made known to us by the light of a higher science, namely, the knowledge which God has of self and which God has communicated to the saints (“*scientia Dei et beatorum*”).⁹ Faith appropriates such principles or knowledge and uses reason to understand them and their effective history critically and systematically and relates this understanding to other things it knows. Theology does not ask *whether* such principles are true (their truth is already acknowledged in faith), but it inquires into what they *mean, how and why* they are true, and in which ways they can be *lived*. (Consequently, the act of faith is not blind or otiose). That is why theology has classically been defined as “faith in search of understanding” (*fides quaerens intellectum*), and the means whereby theology carries out its work is “reason illumined by faith.”¹⁰

If this view of theology is correct, then the distinction between it and religious studies does not reside in *what* is being studied, *who* is studying it, *where* it is being studied, and the *audience* of the study.¹¹ Indeed, all these things may be identical in religious studies and theology. Rather the ground of the distinction between them lies in their specifically different ways of knowing and the means by which their knowledge is acquired and developed (that is, their specific methods and not simply general hermeneutics).

Consequently, scholarship in theology would differ from that in religious studies. Theological education as well as theological research and publication will have as their goals both the critical and systematic understanding of the faith and the reconstruction of faith practices.

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2. This brings us to the second basis of differentiation between theology and religious studies that Browning advances. Recall that for him theological education goes further than religious studies insofar as its practical goal is training for leadership in religious institutions. But if this were the specific practical role of theology, it would confine theological studies to seminaries and divinity schools and rule out theology as an academic discipline, not only in state-sponsored universities but also in religious-affiliated universities, because not many of the latter would be engaged in the training for ministerial service.

Here, again, the Roman documents provide a broader view of the practical role of theology. In particular, *Ex Corde* sees the function of theology as intrinsic to the identity and mission of a Catholic university in promoting: “(a) the search for an integration of knowledge, (b) a dialogue between faith and reason, (c) an ethical concern, and (d) a theological perspective” (no. 15). To achieve this fourfold goal, theology is charged, first, with assisting Catholic universities in fulfilling their service to church and society by research into areas such as “the dignity of human life, the promotion of justice for all, the quality of personal and family life, the protection of nature, the search for peace and political stability, a more just sharing in the world’s resources, and a new economic and political order that will better serve the human community at a national and international level” (no. 32).

Secondly, theology is to serve the university’s pastoral ministry, that is, “that activity . . . which offers the members of the university community an opportunity to integrate religious and moral principles with their academic study and non-academic activities, *thus integrating faith with life*” (no. 38).

Thirdly, theology must help Catholic universities carry out “a fruitful dialogue between the Gospel and culture” (no. 43), enabling the church to come to “a better knowledge of diverse cultures, discern their positive and negative aspects, to receive their authentically human contributions, and to develop means by which it can make the faith better understood by the men and women of a particular culture” (no. 44).

Finally, theology is called to contribute to the Catholic university’s task of evangelization, that is, of being “a living *institutional* witness to Christ and his message” (no. 49).¹²

It is clear that, in the view of the Roman documents, theology has a practical agenda that is different from that of religious studies and that goes beyond training for ministerial leadership. In line with what has been said above about the nature of theology, it may be said that for the Roman documents, scholarship in theological studies is pursued as a service to the faith rendered through the university, and through it, to the church and society at large.

Areas of Religious and Theological Scholarship

Browning enumerates four areas which both religious and theological scholarship must deal with: descriptive studies, historical studies, critical (or systematic) studies, and strategic practical studies. Here Browning makes two distinct points: first, these four areas are common both to religious studies and to theology, and second, these four areas are not categorically different types of studies but four “submoments” of any complete act of reflection in both disciplines.¹³ The first point serves to unify religious studies and theology, the second to preserve the unity of theology. However, fundamental to his two theses is Browning’s understanding, following the lead of Gadamer, of all understanding and interpretation as having a broadly moral concern with application, so that the relation between theory and practice is not from theory to practice but from practice to theory to practice.

It is because of this hermeneutical stance that Browning proposes that theology be conceived as “fundamental practical theology” and advances his fourfold division of theology. I have no quarrel either with his understanding of *phronesis* or with his division. However, for reasons enumerated above, I do not agree with his statement that “all theological scholarship, to be genuinely theological, should exhibit to varying degrees aspects of all four steps.” That theological scholarship (as well as religious scholarship) should involve all four functional specialties is desirable and indeed necessary, but that is not what makes theological scholarship theological. Lonergan, who also proposes a fourfold functional specialty roughly equivalent to Browning’s, explicitly insists that it is the threefold “conversion”—intellectual, moral, and religious—that is the indispensable condition for theological work.¹⁴

By indicating the kinds of practical agenda of theology, the Roman documents implicitly spell out the areas in which theological scholarship should be engaged. But they do not explicitly consider the issue of the interrelationship between theory and practice, and consequently they do not insist on the necessity of dealing with all four levels or moments of theological scholarship as Browning does. *Ex Corde*’s emphasis on the role of theology in the dialogue between faith and cultures may serve as a corrective to what seems to be Browning’s excessive concern with Western institutions and culture as evidenced in the following statement: “But attention to religious and cultural pluralism should be pursued out of a prior scholarly commitment to understand the religious traditions that have most profoundly shaped Western *institutions and culture*. Religious studies may go further than scholarship for theological education in studying non-Western traditions; it should not, however, go so far as to forsake the traditions most central to Western culture and institutions.” My

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past experiences with theological education and scholarship, especially in seminaries and divinity schools, would seem to warrant the opposite caution against provincialism and Western cultural hegemony. Globalization and cross-cultural approaches have remained so far, in my experience, more of a dream than actual achievements.

Furthermore, with their emphasis on theology's service to church and world, the Roman documents appear to open another area for theological scholarship which has been called "scholarship of *praxis*."¹⁵ Besides conventional scholarship that focuses on the search for new information and integration of the findings into new perspectives, attention must be given to "how learnings can both arise from the life of the communities and how these learnings can be applied to address human problems."¹⁶

Qualities of Theological Scholarship

Browning has specified criteria of excellence appropriate for the four areas of theological scholarship: cognitive objectivity and distance in descriptive and historical studies, internal coherence and external adequacy for systematic theology, and all these criteria and a host of others for strategic practical studies. The Roman documents have little to add to this list of criteria of excellence. But they make more explicit another quality by insisting on the contribution theological scholarship must make to ecumenical dialogue and interreligious dialogue.¹⁷ These two aspects were also highlighted in a recent issue of the newsletter of the World Conference of Associations of Theological Institutions.¹⁸

In summary, with regard to the three issues raised by Browning, the Roman view is both narrower and broader than Browning's. Concerning the nature and method of theology, the Roman position insists on the indispensable role of revelation and faith, and not merely hermeneutics, as methodological principles for theology and as determinative for the nature of theological studies. With regard to the areas of theological scholarship, the Roman view expands them far beyond Browning's focus on training for leadership in religious institutions. Finally, with regard to the qualities of theological scholarship, the Roman documents require that good theological research and scholarship take into consideration ecumenical and interreligious unity.

Browning's insightful essay has raised a host of challenging issues for scholarship in religious studies and theology. A conversation about Browning's views and some of the recent Roman documents, which advance a somewhat divergent view of theology and theological scholarship, may prove to be mutually enriching.

ENDNOTES

1. The first document, an apostolic constitution issued by Pope John Paul II on April 15, 1979, is entitled *Sapientia Christiana* (henceforth *Sapientia*). The English translation is available from the Vatican Polyglot Press, Rome. The second document, issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on May 24, 1990, is entitled "Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian" (henceforth *Ecclesial Vocation*). The English translation is available in *Origins*, vol. 20, n. 8 (July 5, 1990): 117-26. The third document, an apostolic constitution issued by Pope John Paul II on August 15, 1990, is entitled *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (henceforth *Ex Corde*). The English translation is available from the Office for Publishing and Promotion Services of the United States Catholic Conference, Washington, DC.

2. See Ray L. Hart, "Religious and Theological Studies in American Higher Education: A Pilot Study," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 59 (1991) 715-827.

3. *Sapientia* requires that in ecclesiastical universities and faculties "those who teach disciplines concerning faith and morals must receive, after making their profession of faith, a canonical mission from the Chancellor or his delegate" and that "the other teachers must receive permission to teach from the Chancellor or his delegate" (art. 27). *Sapientia* does not specify what the "disciplines concerning faith and morals" are; however, the "Norms of Application" issued by the Congregation for Catholic Education for the Correct Implementation of the Apostolic Constitution *Sapientia Christiana* (April 29, 1979) enumerates under theological disciplines Bible, fundamental theology, dogmatic theology, moral and spiritual theology, pastoral theology, liturgy, church history, patrology, archaeology, and canon law (art. 51). "The other teachers," who must receive "permission" to teach, presumably refers to professors of other disciplines. "Norms of Applications" speaks of "auxiliary disciplines" such as Latin and biblical languages (art. 51). However, in art. 18, "Norms of Application" specifies that "non-Catholic teachers . . . require permission to teach from the Chancellor." Presumably *Sapientia* does not envisage the possibility of non-Catholics teaching theological disciplines full-time.

The 1983 Code of Canon Law stipulates that "it is necessary that those who teach theological disciplines in any institute of higher studies have a mandate from the competent ecclesiastical authority" (canon 812). Institutes of higher studies include all and only Catholic colleges, universities, institutes, and academies (except seminaries that are regulated by another section of the Code, namely, canons 232-264). The question is whether professors in "departments of religious studies," as distinct from those in "departments of theology," are covered by this regulation. Perhaps the governing board of the university, in consultation with the faculty, may decide whether any or all courses taught in the department of religious studies are properly theology. To complicate matters, some Catholic universities (e.g., the University of San Diego) have "departments of religious and theological studies."

4. There seems to be a terminological contradiction between this claim that the difference in critical distance in religious studies and theology is not "categorical" and Browning's earlier statement that "the major difference between scholarship in religious studies and theological education is the degree and *kind* of epistemological distance they each achieve" (emphasis added). Are not "category" and "kind" the same?

5. *Ecclesial Vocation* urges the theologian "to deepen his own life of faith and continuously unite his scientific research with prayer" so that becoming more open to the "supernatural sense of faith," he or she will accept it as "a sure rule for guiding his reflections and helping him assess the correctness of his conclusions (no. 8). While it is understandable how a deep life of faith can strengthen the theologian's adherence to the divine teaching, it is mystifying piety to say that accepting the supernatural sense of faith

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helps “assessing the correctness” of theological conclusions. Such an evaluative process is a purely scholarly endeavor, and no amount of prayer can disclose the logical consistency of theological reasoning. It is also to be noted that the scholar of religion should do no less than the theologian to lead a life in conformity with his or her beliefs and teachings.

6. I am aware that I have provided so far only a negative characterization of religious studies, partly because the Roman documents do not specify its nature and method as an academic discipline. In my view, religious studies, broadly speaking, is an academic discipline in which students learn to experience, understand the meaning, judge the truth, and evaluate the practical implications of the various manifestations of religions by means of purely rational standards.

7. Art. 67 # 1 says: “The study of Sacred Scripture is, as it were, the soul of Sacred Theology, which rests upon the written Word of God together with living Tradition, as its perpetual foundation.” Again, art. 68 # 1: “Revealed truth must be considered also in connection with contemporary, evolving, scientific accomplishments”

8. This recommendation can be taken to be equivalent to Browning’s prescription that “within both religious studies and theological education, the study of the effective history of the Western religious traditions should follow publicly accountable methods of scholarship and aspire for a critical understanding of these traditions.” In carrying out their tasks of developing a theological science, theologians are urged by *Ecclesial Vocation* to make use of “philosophical concepts,” “historical disciplines,” and the “human sciences” (no. 10). However, to underline the priority of revelation and faith in theological method, the document goes on to say: “Here it is important to emphasize that when theology employs the elements and conceptual tools of philosophy or other disciplines, discernment is needed. The ultimate normative principle for such discernment is revealed doctrine, which itself must furnish the criteria for the evaluation of these elements and conceptual tools and not vice versa” (ibid.).

9. See *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 1, a. 2., c. For Thomas, these principles include not only Christian mysteries that in principle absolutely exceed the grasp of human reason but also those truths that *per se* can be grasped by reason but have been revealed so that they can be understood by all, quickly, and without errors. That is why, besides philosophical sciences (one could add, religious studies), there is also theology or *sacra doctrina*. See ibid., q. 1, a. 3., c.

10. An alternative way of conceiving the difference between religious studies and theology has been advanced by Schubert Ogden in “Religious Studies and Theological Studies: What Is Involved in the Distinction Between Them?” *Bulletin/CSSR*, 24/1 (1995) 3-4. Ogden argues that the difference between the two disciplines lies in the “constitutive question” each poses on the second level of critical reflection about the claims a life-*praxis* makes or implies insofar as this life-*praxis* is mediated by religion (religious studies) or by this, that, or other particular religion (theology). If by “constitutive question” Ogden means the formal perspective (what Scholastic theologians call the *objectum formale quo*) of a discipline, then I would agree. However, Ogden unduly narrows the scope of the theological enterprise by focusing only on the issue of truth claim; in other words, of the four intentional operations as described by Bernard Lonergan, he singles out judging and ignores experiencing, understanding, and evaluating. To put it differently, of the eight functional specialties of theology, he privileges history and doctrines, and neglects research, interpretation, dialectic, foundations, systematics, and communications. See Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972).

11. See Ray L. Hart, “Religious Studies and Theological Studies.”

12. For *Ex Corde*, the role of theology for Catholic universities is so central that every Catholic university should have a department, or at least a chair, of theology (see no. 19).

13. Here I find Browning's terminology somewhat confusing. He uses "studies," "movements," "submoments," "steps," and "types" to refer to these four elements of religious and theological scholarship. Following Lonergan, who distinguishes among field of data, results of investigation, and stages of the process from data to results, I think the term "functional specialties" is more helpful to name what Browning has in mind. See Lonergan, *Method in Theology*. Browning has developed more extensively these four functional specialties in his *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991).

14. See *Method in Theology*, 237-43; 267-71. To be exact, Lonergan distinguishes eight functional specialties corresponding to the four intentional operations on the two phases of theology, mediating and mediated, or indirect discourse and direct discourse.

15. See "Theological Scholarship and Research: Entire Draft Document," *WOCATI News: The Newsletter of the World Conference of Associations of Theological Institutions*, no. 4 (April 1995) 8, 11.

16. *Ibid.*, 8. The document goes on to note that "the effects of contextualization and dialogue mean the expansion of critical inquiry beyond the rational, historical forms dominant in most Northern theologies. For there are ways of knowing that are outside the commonly accepted forms of critical understanding. These include the importance of intuitive, artistic, and emotive sources of theological understanding . . . Thus the importance of *the scholarship of praxis* comes to the fore" (11).

17. See *Ex Corde*, no. 47.

18. See *WOCATI News*, op. cit., 7-12.

Multicultural and Global Theological Scholarship: An Asian American Perspective

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The paper presented by Don Browning has provided a valuable service to theological education in the way in which it has brought the hermeneutic theory of Heidegger-Gadamer-Ricoeur to bear on the topic of theological studies, particularly as it relates to religious studies. His attempt to bridge religious studies and theological education through this hermeneutic method is not only persuasive but admirable. The four styles or “submoments” of theological and religious reflection seem to restate the existing traditional divisions of religious and theological studies: socio-anthropological studies, historical studies, critical or systematic studies, and practical studies of inquiry in theological seminaries or graduate schools. I am impressed with Browning’s ability to refine a coherent and systematic view of theological education.

However, as we attempt to develop the nature and criteria of multicultural and global theological scholarship in North America, Browning’s paper presents many problems. As *an* Asian American (not *the* Asian American who represents all Asian Americans), I am bewildered by his insistence upon the centrality of European tradition for understanding the Christian faith. This position implies that, because I am a non-European American, my understanding of the Christian faith is partial and my potential for becoming an authentic Christian is denied. I am reminded of my marginal status even in theological education and religious studies in this country. His attempt to embrace non-Western religious traditions, cultural pluralism, and minorities seems superficial because of his primary commitment to Western religious traditions. He fails to take multiculturalism seriously as one of the most crucial issues shaping today’s theological education in America. Defining the nature and criteria of theological scholarship based on Eurocentric and dominant group ideologies seems to preserve the traditional approach in a new form. Let me attempt to justify this generalization in detail.

First, the hermeneutic method that Browning has used to define the nature and criteria of theological scholarship is a product of European intellectual developments. His approach is then a neo-Eurocentric approach, which dismisses an Asian American approach or any other non-European approach to

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human self-understanding and theological interpretation. Why should Asian American Christians who have quite different histories and religious traditions be governed by the Western hermeneutic method?

No hermeneutic method is universally applicable. A method of interpretation is always conditioned by a particular cultural and historical context: method and context are inseparable, for method is a product of context. A different context produces a different method. Because the context of Asian Americans is different from that of European Americans, Asian Americans need a different hermeneutic method to understand their Christian faith. The hermeneutic method developed in Europe is useful to the dominant groups of Americans who have their roots in Europe, but not to Asian Americans or other ethnic minorities. Asian Americans must develop their own indigenous hermeneutic, which may provide a quite different understanding of the nature and criteria of theological scholarship. Because method and context are united, we should not impose our method of interpretation on other people whose cultural and historical context is different from ours.

The hermeneutic method that Browning espouses compels us to believe that Christianity as a religion of Western civilization can be fully understood only by those who have been part of Western history and traditions. The purpose of theological education and religious studies is then basically to reclaim what has already been a part of Western traditions and to refine it further through a “distancing” process. If the pre-understanding or pre-judgment has been shaped by history and has been the basis for human self-understanding and interpretation of theological issues, Asian Americans, who are outsiders to Western history, cannot understand the full implications of theological tradition. No matter how much we as Asian Americans may study Plato, Aristotle, Moses, Jesus, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, etc., we cannot be part of the Western Christian tradition, unless we have grown up and become indigenized in the West as Westerners. Because the Western Christian tradition seems to represent the norm of Christianity, Asian Americans are unsuited for the full implication of Christian theology.

Browning’s paper reminded me of the experience I had when I began to teach theology at Otterbein College in Ohio more than 25 years ago. In the class, a freshman raised his hand and asked me, “Being an Asian person, how much do you know about Christianity?” He thought that he knew Christianity better than I, because he was a European American. At the time I thought he was an outrageous racist, but now I realize why he asked the question. He was a white male and a fully indigenized American, grounded in the European Christian tradition. Regardless of how many academic degrees I had in theology, from his perspective I was an unauthentic Christian, or a marginal Christian, who

pretended to know something about Christianity but did not know what real Christianity was.

Let me further illustrate the implications of “pre-understandings” for Asian Americans. The pre-understandings of an Asian American are different from those of European Americans, because the former have been shaped by different religious traditions, such as Buddhist, Confucian, Taoist, Shamanistic, and other religious traditions. If pre-understandings are essential for self-understanding and the mode of thinking, Asian Americans cannot fully understand themselves and their way of thinking unless they critically reflect upon their own religious traditions through a “distancing” or objectifying process. The only value for Asian American students in coming to theological schools is for them to engage in a critical evaluation of their own traditions through a comparative and dialogical process. An egg is a good metaphor to illustrate the status of Asian American theological students. The egg white represents their concept of Christianity, and the egg yolk represents their own religious traditions. Their Christian faith is external to their inner prejudices shaped by other religious traditions. Thus, they understand Christianity from the perspective of other religions, while European Americans understand other religions from the perspective of Christianity. Dialogue between Asian Americans and European Americans can truly enrich theological scholarship in North America.

Although Browning’s Euro-centric approach alienates me as an Asian American, I sympathize with him because he is of European decent. As a European American, he cannot help but conceive the Christian faith from a European perspective because his “prejudice” is grounded in European history. It must be difficult for him, or for anyone, to transcend his prejudice, for he is bound by his past history and tradition. However, he could encourage other people, such as Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans, African Americans, Native Americans, or any other minorities who are alienated from the dominant European Americans, to develop their own understandings of the nature and criteria of theological scholarship, for they have different prejudices. Browning fails to do this, because he makes his prejudice the norm for all other prejudices. Although he wants to give a full account of theological reflection by “women, alienated males, Blacks, Hispanics, Asians, the poor, and the disabled,” he could not do it, because he sets the criteria of scholarly excellence based on the ideology of dominant groups of the West. If minority groups were allowed to make full accounts of their theological reflection, they would establish their own norms and criteria of scholarship.

Many different canons and standards of scholarly excellence must be embraced in global and multicultural theological education. For example, Asian Americans must develop their own standards of judging their academic achieve-

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ments and evaluating their scholarly excellence based on their prejudices. In other words, every ethnic minority group must prescribe its own understanding of “the nature and criteria of theological scholarship.” By allowing every group to describe its own statement, we must recognize its authenticity regardless of its social or political status. The authenticity of its statement must be relative to its faithfulness to the tradition it represents. The statement of a minority group, such as the Asian American community, should be as authentic as that of the European American group. Authenticity should be neither determined by the majority nor controlled by the power of dominant groups. Just as genuine plurality does not imply the domination of the majority over the minorities, the authenticity of theological scholarship is not decided by the dominant group. Minority views must be equally weighed if plurality and multiculturalism are to be taken seriously. However, Browning could not fully recognize the equality of different cultural groups when he says, “attention to religious and cultural pluralism should be pursued out of a prior scholarly commitment to understand the religious traditions that have most profoundly shaped Western *institutions and culture*.”¹

If pre-understandings are taken seriously in the enrichment of human self-understanding as the goal of religious studies and theological education, Asian Americans cannot make their priority the study of the religious traditions that shaped Western institutions and culture. Their priority should be the study of those religious traditions that shaped Asian institutions and culture, for they have their roots in Asian traditions. If we want to give full accounts of theological reflection by minorities, we need to have harmony among the many different perspectives on theological scholarship.

Although it is difficult for us to conceive of harmony among various definitions and criteria of theological scholarship in this stage of our debate, we must work toward the goal of establishing the mosaic of different standards of theological scholarship if we want our theological education to become truly multicultural and global in orientation. In this mosaic, dialogue is one of the most effective processes of resolving differences in theological and religious scholarship. Making this kind of mosaic norm effective may require a radical transformation of theological education and religious studies. If we take multiculturalism and plurality seriously, we cannot help but pursue this radical structural transformation to accommodate the mosaic of multitheological scholarship. I would like to suggest that ATS initiate discussions on fundamental administrative, personnel, and curricular reforms in graduate theological schools, so that our theological and religious scholarship will be transformed into a new mosaic of differing perspectives that reflect differing pre-understandings.

This kind of radical transformation is essential for theological schools because of the composition of current student populations. Browning is right

when he writes, “religious studies and theological education should study the diverse cultural and religious traditions of their student populations.” The theological school where I teach is a good example for illustrating this point. At Drew University Theological School, we have more female students than male students, and more ethnic minority students than white male students. In my “Systematic Theology” course last year, which is required for all M.Div. students, about 30 percent of the total students enrolled in the course were Koreans; about 20 percent were other Asians, Blacks, and Hispanics; about 30 percent were white women; and about 20 percent were white men.² The student composition of this course may not reflect the demography of the total student population in our school, but I am aware that at least 20 percent of entering students are Koreans, and another 20 percent are other ethnic minorities.³ What the demography of this student population indicates is that at least 40 percent of our seminary students are ethnic minorities; white males, who represent the so-called dominant group in our society, are in the minority. I do not believe that the demography of Drew’s student population is unusual. There are numerous Korean students at any number of our theological schools. If theological schools were truly responsive to the needs of Korean and other Asian American students, they would offer courses on Asian religious traditions and cultural history. How many theological schools offer courses in Korean religious traditions and culture? Without learning their culture and religious traditions, how can students arrive at critical self-discovery and self-understanding which seem to be the essence of theological and religious education?

To respond to the needs of Korean American students, I have begun to teach courses that help them construct their theology based on Korean religious and philosophical traditions. The four seminar courses consist of Korean Theology I: Cosmological Foundations, Korean Theology II: Metaphysical Foundations, Korean Theology III: Religious Foundations, and Korean Theology IV: Specific Topics. I would like to see more course offerings in Korean studies in history, preaching, and other areas of theological education in our school. I hope other theological seminaries will inaugurate courses dealing with Korean or Asian history and religious traditions as part of their institutional responsibilities for Asian American students. We need curricular reform to meet the demand of growing Asian American and ethnic minority student populations in our theological schools.

Curricular reform is not possible without also reforming faculty personnel. At present, white males constitute the majority of our theological school faculty, in spite of white males being in the minority in theological student populations. While we cannot expect the demographic composition of the faculty to mirror that of the study body, the theological faculty cannot dismiss students’ different needs based on their gender and ethnicity. Asian American students, who

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represent a significant proportion of theological students as a whole, must have their needs met in the theological curriculum. In order to teach the courses that meet their needs, to advise them in their academic and spiritual growth, and to support their identity, theological schools need to recruit more Asian faculty members. When Korean American students represent one-fifth of the student body, as in our school, we should expect to have several Korean American faculty members. I am, however, the only full-time Korean American faculty member at my school. I am certain that many theological schools with a significant number of Korean and Asian American students do not have even one Asian American faculty member who can teach Asian culture, Asian religious traditions, or Asian preaching.

There are at least three reasons why European American faculty members cannot fully meet the demands of the increasing number of Asian students in our theological schools. First, as Browning has pointed out, according to the Heidegger-Gadamer-Ricoeur theory, European American scholars cannot fully understand Asian traditions or culture because of their pre-understandings. Regardless how much they may have studied Asian history or Asian religions, their understanding is limited. Second, European American faculty members have limitations in sharing and understanding the emotions and spiritual needs of Korean or Asian American students. Their capacity for advising Asian American students in academic, emotional, and spiritual matters is limited. Finally, Asian American students need to develop their self-image and identity as distinctive to their own situations in North American society. Just as children's self-images are molded by their parents, Asian American students in theological schools adopt values and norms from their white professors, in the absence of Asian American professors. Asian American professors can serve as models to help Asian American students develop their self-images and can help to guide their self-discovery in the process of their theological education.

Unless theological schools recruit more Asian American faculty members by restructuring their faculty compositions, Asian American students will become marginal in theological education. Browning's insistence on "a prior scholarly commitment to understand the religious traditions that have most profoundly shaped Western *institutions and culture*" not only supports the traditional approach to theological education, but also perpetuates the European American domination of our theological schools. For Asian American students, the understanding of their own religious traditions should be their prior commitment, for their self-understanding is dependent on their "pre-understanding." Moreover, Browning does not seem to take pluralism seriously. He undermines the function of the theological school as the servant of its students, just as the church as an institution is to serve its congregations. As

children of God, no non-Western students should be marginalized or denied their right to receive the same quality of theological education that European American students receive.

Reforming faculty personnel seems more crucial in graduate schools for religious studies than in theological schools. Because the goal of religious studies is to understand religious traditions from their own perspectives, Western norms, shaped by Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, should not be used for understanding Asian religions. Each religion must be examined from its own "pre-understanding," which has been deeply affected by its own effective history. Western scholars have certain limitations in teaching Asian religions such as Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, Shamanism, Shintoism, Hinduism, and Sikhism because of their own Western prejudices. Regardless of how much they have read and studied classical writings of Confucius, Mencius, Mo Tzu, Lao Tzu, Chuang Tzu, Hsun Tzu, Nagajuna, Asanga, Vasubandhu, Chih-k'ai, Fa-tsang, Hui-neng, Chang Tsai, Ch'eng Hao, Chu Hsi, Yulgok, T'oegye, Won-hyo, and a whole host of other scholars, Western scholars do not share the historical traditions that have shaped the Asian way of thinking. Western scholars of Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism, for example, who are not indigenous to these traditions, cannot fully understand them because they are ways of life. Just as Asian scholarship in Christianity is limited, Western scholarship in Asian religions is limited. This is the reason why Asian religions can be taught more effectively by Asian scholars and Western religions by Western scholars. Although many courses in Asian religions are offered in religious studies departments, very few Asians are on the faculty of the graduate schools. If we truly believe in the Heidegger-Gadamer-Ricoeur theory as the hermeneutic method of theological and religious studies, we must recruit more Asian faculty members in our theological schools and graduate schools for religious studies. Asian American scholars, who have been deeply rooted in Asian traditions and culture and immersed in the multicultural society of North America, can become great assets in teaching Asian religions. Faculty personnel reform is certainly crucial to the scholarly excellence of religious studies as well as to theological education.

In order to facilitate these reforms in curricula and faculty personnel, as well as to authenticate and strengthen our multicultural and global theological education, we must also carry out administrative reform on institutional levels. The distribution of faculty resources, curriculum development, and various extracurricular activities in theological and religious studies must be made according to the demography of student populations. If Asian American students occupy a significant portion of the student body, Asian American input is necessary for any decision that affects their educational and scholarly perfor-

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mances. In our pluralistic society, the administrative function of theological institutions or graduate schools for religious studies must change from the paradigm of uniform production to the paradigm of coordinative process.⁴

The coordinative process in the mosaic of a multicultural community is a decentralized, non-hierarchical, and democratic design that attempts to integrate various perspectives for the enhancement of self-cultivation. Unlike the traditional design of schools that stresses uniformity, the coordinative process in pluralistic academic communities emphasizes the harmony of distinctive approaches to self-discovery and self-understanding. Uniformity presupposes a single norm or single canon of scholarship, while harmony presupposes the co-existence of differing norms or standards thereof. Because student populations bring diverse cultural and religious traditions, and their pre-understandings are as diverse as their contexts, we must not use uniform standards or criteria to judge academic and professional performance. In other words, it is a mistake for theological or religious institutions to apply the same yardstick to measure different units. Just as the linear measure is not equivalent to the circular measure, the Euro-American norms of academic excellence cannot be applied to the Asian American norms. Thus, administrative reform is needed to harmonize and coordinate differing standards relative to various cultural, historical, religious, sexual, and social orientations.

Because academic criteria for Asian American students are different, Browning's idea of the standards or canons of excellence, which are based on Eurocentric "prejudices," must be *complemented* (but not replaced) by another criteria of excellence, which is grounded in Asian "prejudices."

Let me illustrate the inadequacy of Eurocentric criteria for excellence in evaluating the performance of Asian American students in theological education. The first style of theological reflection deals with descriptive studies. In evaluating scholarly excellence for the descriptive studies of Asian American individuals and communities, a degree of relative objectivity is attainable by Asian Americans. As description is never neutral, it cannot be totally objective; it is always prejudiced by the descriptor. Because it is impossible for European Americans to comprehend fully the context of Asian Americans, criteria based on Eurocentric prejudices should not be used in judging the excellence of descriptive studies in Asian American situations. Moreover, the tools used for descriptive studies are not adequate for Asian American situations. For example, sociology, psychology, and anthropology developed by European Americans have their own limitations, because they are again conditioned by their prejudices. In an ideal situation, the sociology that assists the descriptive studies of Asian American situations must be Asian sociology, as distinctive from Western sociology. In Asia, particularly in Confucian society, family and

community form the foundations of social theory, while class structure and individualism seem to play a primary role in Western sociology. In Western psychology, especially in Freudian psychology, sex is the dominant theme; while in Asian psychology, spiritual development through yoga or meditation seems to be the central issue. In Western anthropology, the distinctiveness of humanity is stressed over the cosmos; while in Asian anthropology, humanity is one part of the cosmos. In Asia, the study of humanity is inseparable from the study of the cosmos. Western anthropology is, therefore, replaced by Asian anthropocosmology or cosmoanthropology.⁵ The comparative study of sociology, psychology, and anthropology between West and East alone is an enormous task, and is beyond the scope of this paper.

What I have attempted here is to demonstrate that Asian Americans need to develop a distinctive form of their own sociology, psychology, and anthropology to describe the Asian American context. Because Asian American approaches to understanding individuals and communities are different, the standards of evaluating descriptive studies with regard to Asian American problems and issues must also be different. We cannot judge academic excellence irrespective of students' backgrounds, for the standards of judgment are not universal. In developing the standards of excellence for descriptive studies of Asian Americans, we must include the assistance of Asian American sociologists, Asian American psychologists, and Asian American anthropologists, who are deeply imbedded in their effective history and committed to their own religious traditions.

The second style or submoment of theological reflection deals with historical inquiry. The standards of excellence for historical studies within theological education again create problems for Asian American students. Because Asian Americans have their roots in Asian history, their understanding of history is different from the European American understanding of history. The historical theology taught in our theological schools has very little to do with the self-discovery and self-understanding of Asian Americans and their communities. According to the Western mode of thinking, history, as time filled with events, particularly with human events, moves linearly from the beginning to the end of all things (eschaton). History has a definite beginning and a definite ending. However, according to the Asian way of thinking, history moves cyclically following the cosmic cycles. It has no beginning or ending: beginning is ending and ending is beginning. This history of eternal returns through constant change and renewal is different from the history of linear movement from beginning to end or from promise to fulfillment.

Another problem for Asian Americans in historical inquiry has to do with the history of Christianity in European civilization. As non-participants or

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superficial participants in European civilization, no matter how much Asian Americans study facts, events, monuments, or texts of Christianity in European history, they cannot fully understand the historical implications of the Christian faith. The performance of Asian American students should not, therefore, be judged by European American standards of historical scholarship, because these standards are irrelevant and meaningless for Asian American students who are in search of their self-discovery and self-cultivation. New standards are needed for Asian American students in historical studies in our theological schools.

The third style of theological reflection deals with critical studies in theology or systematic theology. In order to “test the internal coherence and external adequacy of the central themes of the Christian faith,” critical studies in theology must use rational and coherent thinking, which can provide “the canons of clear argumentation and philosophic consistency.”⁶ From an Asian perspective, what seems to be clear argumentation may not be clear, and what seems to be philosophical consistency may not be consistent, because Asian thought processes are different. It is wrong to presume that everyone thinks the same way. For example, “primitive or primordial mentality” has a logic or mode of thinking that is quite different from our own.⁷ Likewise, Asian Americans, having their roots in Asian history and culture, think quite differently from European Americans. What is perfectly logical to Asians seems to be irrational, unclear, and inconsistent to European scholarship. According to the normative structure of Western thinking, Asian Americans, like some other marginal minorities, have no systematic theology.⁸ Asian Americans, being rooted in a different conceptual scheme, must have their own standards or norms of excellence in critical studies in theology.

The mode of Asian thinking or Asian logic can be best characterized as holistic or non-dualistic thinking, which is quite different from the Western dualistic logic of either/or. The Aristotelian logic of the exclusive middle became the background of Western thinking, even though postmodern developments in quantum mechanics and pluralism seem to invalidate it.⁹ Any intellectual person in the West is still expected to think in terms of the exclusive mode of an either/or. For example, what is not right is wrong, and what is wrong is not right. Likewise, what is not good is evil, and what is evil is not good. This kind of thinking seems to be what gives Western logic clarity in argumentation and consistency in the thought process.

Unlike the Western mode of thinking, the Asian mode of thinking includes the middle because of its holistic character. If the Western mode of thinking is characterized as either/or logic, the Asian mode of thinking is characterized as both/and logic. The both/and mode of thinking is deeply rooted in the philoso-

phy of yin and yang, which are the elementary symbols of cosmology.¹⁰ Everything in the world including the human thought process, can be categorized as yin and yang. Yin and yang are mutually *inclusive*. Yin is yin but also yang, and yang is yang but also yin—and at the same time. Yin is not yin without yang, and yang is not yang without yin. This kind of thinking is not only absurd but unintelligible to the Western mind. If Asian American students, whose “pre-thinking” is deeply rooted in a both/and mode, reflect on the central themes of the Christian faith, they fail to “respect the canons of clear argumentation and philosophic consistency.”

The existential condition of Asian Americans as marginal persons reinforces their thinking in a both/and mode, for marginal persons are not only in-between but also in-both worlds.¹¹ Asian Americans are both Asians and Americans. They are Asians because of their ethnic roots, and they are Americans because of their naturalization. To deny them a both/and mode of thinking is, in fact, to deny their existential reality. Thus, the Eurocentric canons of “clear argumentation and philosophic consistency,” which deny the both/and mode of thinking, further alienate and marginalize Asian American students in theological education and religious studies.

The fourth style of theological reflection deals with strategic theological studies or practical theology. I do not quarrel with Browning’s point that our self-understanding is not only a practical task but also is based on practice. The “practice-theory-practice” model of theological reflection makes sense, but it is questionable whether Browning really practices it. If he denies the older “theory-practice” model, why does he begin with the highly abstract theory of knowing, namely the hermeneutical theory of Heidegger-Gadamer-Ricoeur? Moreover, his use of the word “strategic” seems to suggest an application of theory more than it does a basis of theory.

From an Asian perspective, religion is a way of life and theology is a critical reflection on it. *Praxis* is then the primary function of theological education, for theology is “*fundamentally practical in nature*.” Just as thinking and living are inseparable, practice and theory are both sides of the same coin. Although they are inseparable, life is more fundamental than thinking, and practice is more vital than theory. Asian Americans have different ways of living, different modes of thinking, and different styles of practice. Therefore, their scholarship should not be evaluated by or subject to the academic standards of European American people.

In conclusion, let me make a few comments or suggestions that may complement Browning’s paper. First, his paper seems to dismiss creativity as a criterion of scholarly excellence. He fails to allow for a creative dimension in his approach, focusing instead on the Western tradition and history that have

shaped the Western “pre-understanding” in theological education. This Western pre-understanding seems to inhibit the possibility of creative transformation in theological scholarship. This shortcoming is inherent in his choice of the hermeneutic theory of Heidegger-Gadamer-Ricoeur. It is a mistake to make this particular hermeneutic a universally valid theory for theological education and religious studies. Any valid and creative method is born out of living situations or actual practices. If Browning truly believes in the “practice-theory-practice” model, he should allow different methods of interpretation that grow out of different practices.

My next suggestion is to add a spiritual dimension to the nature and criteria of theological scholarship. Unlike other disciplines, the distinctiveness of theological education lies in its spiritual cultivation, which is deeply rooted in mystical traditions. European American scholars have a tendency to dismiss mystical and spiritual dimensions because they place emphasis on the rational category of either/or. Scholarship limited to rational and intellectual pursuit is less than theological scholarship. My suggestion is to enrich our theological scholarship by including Asian spirituality and mysticism, as well as by rediscovering the mystical tradition of the West.

Finally, let me comment again on the hermeneutic method. Theological scholarship in the past has been dominated by Western philosophies. Multicultural and global theological education compel us to go beyond Western traditions and intellectual work. Because method is inseparable from its content, Christians must have a Christian hermeneutic. Christians, whether they are Westerners or Asians, must discover their own hermeneutic methods in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. In other words, the hermeneutical *principle* of Christianity, which is the foundation of differing hermeneutic methods that correspond to human situations, is not found in a particular civilization, but is essentially grounded in Jesus Christ himself. As Gustavo Gutierrez said, “The great hermeneutical principle of faith, and hence the basis and foundation of all theological reasoning, is Jesus Christ.”¹² Going beyond Western tradition and history, we must discover the hermeneutical principle of the Christian faith in Jesus Christ, who can act as the harmonizing force of the beautiful and dynamic mosaic of different hermeneutic methods and scholarly criteria in our multicultural and global theological education.

ENDNOTES

1. See Browning's essay in this volume, 6.
2. Ibid.
3. According to the Drew University Theological School, Korean student roster, published on September 1, 1995, there are 85 Korean students enrolled in the theological program. More than half of them are pursuing M.Div., S.T.M., and M.T.S. degrees in the theological school. The others are working toward a Ph.D. degree in theology.
4. Mark C. Taylor suggests that the university in the postmodern era should shift its structure from the paradigm of the factory to the paradigm of the network. See his "Unsettling Issues," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 62 (1994) 957.
5. Tu Wei-ming and Young Chan Ro use the term "anthropocosmology." See Tu Wei-ming, *The Way: Learning and Politics in Classical Confucian Humanism*, Occasional Paper and Monograph Series No.2, The Institute of East Asian Philosophies (Singapore, 1985) 5; Young Chan Ro, *The Korean Neo-Confucianism of Yi Yulgok* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989). I have used the word "cosmoanthropology" to replace the Western notion of "anthropology." See my forthcoming book, *The Trinity in Asian Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996).
6. Browning, op. cit., 9.
7. See Hans H. Penner, "Holistic Analysis: Conjectures and Refutations," in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 62 (1994) 991.
8. Systematic theology, as defined in a theological school, is a task of European theology, which is different from Asian or marginal theology. According to Peggy Billings, "Systematic theology is a result of systems thought, tending toward hierarchy and reliance on rationality. Reflecting the action of God from the margin is a process, provisional and contemporaneous, for it knows its life to be conditional, continuing only by accident and the grace of God." See Peggy Billings, "A Reflection from the Margin," *Social Questions Bulletin*, 83/3 (May-June, 1993) 4. See also Jung Young Lee, *Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 271-3.
9. "Planck's quantum theory and Einstein's theory of relativity led to the Aristotelian 'either-or' being questioned. The result of the first was that the axiom, *natura non facit saltus* (nature makes no leaps), became untenable. As a consequence of the quantum theory, we know today that nature is very capable of making such leaps. This was the first intrusion into the Aristotelian 'either-or. . . .' We know today that matter is not merely a spatial element but also a temporal one. It is corpuscular as well as wave-like, so that both are merely different aspects of the same thing. In 'this as well as that' lies the decisive impetus which has led to questioning the Aristotelian 'either-or.'" See Jean Geysler in P. J. Saber, *Eastern Wisdom and Western Thought: A Comparative Study in the Modern Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Banes and Noble, 1970), 10; Jung Young Lee, *The Theology of Change: A Christian Concept of God in an Eastern Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), 16.
10. See in author's following publications: "The Yin-Yang Way of Thinking: A Possible Method for Ecumenical Theology," *International Review of Mission* 51 (1971), 363-70; *The Theology of Change: Cosmic Religion* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978); *Embracing Change: Postmodern Interpretations of the I Ching from a Christian Perspective* (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1994); *Marginality* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1955).
11. See author's *Marginality*.
12. Gustavo Gutierrez, *The Power of the Poor in History* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1983), 61. See also *Marginality*, 71.

The Nature and Criteria of Theological Scholarship: An Evangelical Critique and Plan

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Don Browning has undertaken the ambitious task of describing just what constitutes good theological scholarship and research, both in the setting of religious studies departments and in theological schools that have as their main task preparing persons for Christian ministry. Even as he begins, there is an acknowledgment that religious studies programs “. . . may no longer be sufficiently sympathetic to the goals of theological education to adequately prepare scholars for this purpose.”

Consequently, there is more that motivates his essay than an attempt to set forth the definitions and criteria of theological scholarship. There is the recognition that there is a growing division between departments of religious studies, which have generally been responsible for educating the larger number of the professors in theological schools, and that the demands for the theological curriculum in theological schools need to be more responsive to the Christian ministry at the present time. Browning states that, “The underlying concern that motivates this essay can be simply stated: is there a way to state the relation of theological studies and religious studies so that the latter does not function to undermine, or in any way to denigrate, the former?”¹ Such candor and openness to dialogue are most courageous and welcome signs for which we are all grateful.

However, the mere recognition of the existence of “conflict” and “mistrust” along with sets of new criteria for defining and evaluating where scholarship is rightfully taking place, will not prove to be an “open sesame” for the enormous number of issues that lie just below the surface of this problem. Or to put it in other words, the tensions mentioned here may be resolvable, but they will test how willing we are to be truly pluralistic—for instance, with the positions of evangelicals²—and to tackle structures that lie at the very “soul” of the modern university³ and theological school—for example, the general movement from paleo-orthodox belief to established nonbelief.

This, of course, is not the only issue troubling the seminaries in this area of scholarship and curriculum. For almost two decades there has been a call for the seminaries to modify their teaching of the theoretical disciplines in order to

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provide for a more adequate basis on which the practice of ministry might be carried out in the churches. One of the early voices in this cry for some type of academic reform was James Smart, formerly professor of biblical interpretation at Union Theological Seminary in New York. He sized up the problem this way:

Consistently for years there has been an underestimating of the distance between these two contexts [seminary and church] in which the Bible is interpreted, as though it were a very short and easy step the seminary graduate has to take from one to the other Scholars and churchmen [sic] must come awake to the fact that some of the most capable students have not been making that journey very successfully from school to church, from fact to faith, from historical record to sermon text, from cultural artifact to Christian revelation.⁴

Smart's hope for solving the problem rested in how biblical theology was taught, for that was the discipline that undergirded the systematic theology on which church practice was based. But that suggestion came at the end of the reign of the Biblical Theology Movement of Existential or Neo-Orthodox theology, and therefore had a very limited life of its own.

In more recent days, for good or ill, the theological landscape has turned to hermeneutics as the rescuer and repairer of our multiple troubles in the house of theological scholarship. But this too has not met with as much happy success as many had hoped it would. It tended to solve the problem of relating the practical disciplines to the theoretical, but it did so at the expense of what previous days had taken as their given, i.e., the biblical and theological constructs with their own unique methods and content as the starting point for all discussion.

Hermeneutical Theory as an Orienting Perspective

There is little doubt that an examination of hermeneutical theory, as Browning contends, is where the discussion begins today, even if that may not be the complete answer to defining exactly what constitutes theological scholarship and what are its criteria. I certainly agree with Browning when he defines hermeneutics as the "theory of how humans understand (*verstehen*) their world and how human understanding or interpretation is related to human action or *praxis*."⁵ Thus, the hermeneutical process extends, in the new insights offered by the discipline, and from *our own* perspective as well, all the way to the implementation in practical actions and application of what was said.

The most noticeable feature of Browning's essay is the careful avoidance of all references to the place of the author or speaker in the interpretive process,

references to truth, or any criteria for “validating” claims or assertions. By adopting interpretive features mainly from Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur, Browning has chosen to avoid those balancing features introduced by Emile Betti and E.D. Hirsch, Jr., that would call for an interaction with those elements that we contend are missing in much of our scholarly work in theology. Why not begin the theological endeavor on the analogy of the American system of jurisprudence that methodologically claims that the text of Scripture is innocent until it is found offending the historical, psychological, scientific, and experiential evidences to which it made reference? It is not as if provision is not made for validation of the authorial assertions; on the contrary, this approach dares to put every theological claim to the appropriate test in order to examine whether or not the claim is true.

This is not to deny that there are some significant gains in interpretive theory as set forth by Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur; there are. Gadamer is correct that “application is neither a subsequent, nor a merely occasional part of the phenomenon of understanding,” however he goes on to say that it “. . . *codetermines* it as a whole from the beginning.”⁶ But that introduces a major problem: how can the application of the meaning be a *codeterminant of what was intended by the speaker or writer* that preceded and determined what was said long before the practical needs of the reading audience applying that text arose in a thousand new situations? In my judgment, Hirsch is correct—that Gadamer is confusing the meaning process with the parallel work of naming a significance for that same text. In the practical application step of the meaning process, the significance of a text merely names a new relationship that the same principle, fact, or truth has to any number of new persons, situations, or the like. It can hardly be a *codeterminant* of the meaning in the sense that it establishes its truth intentionality or the substance of its assertions. To usurp that function in the practical application of the text is ultimately to put an end to all real communication.

What is most useful here is that the meaning process cannot be declared to be at an end until it brings out the practical engagement that this text must contain. It is necessary that we carry the whole hermeneutical project all the way to its rightful conclusion. Here is the area of our strong agreement.

What is also left unsaid in Gadamer and in Browning’s essay is what the other *codeterminant* (to use their concept) is, along with application. This we believe to be the missing role of the author’s truth-intentions or assertions, which has left theological studies so bankrupt of any unique mission and criteria of its own.

It is precisely at this point where the truth-intentions of the author should be introduced as a balancing *codeterminant* along with application or the whole aspect of *phronesis*. No one has had better success at maintaining such a balance

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than the previously mentioned American professor of English at the University of Virginia, E.D. Hirsch. In his famous distinction, meaning is a return to those types of assertions that the author was attempting to make, while application is the naming of a relationship between that meaning and another person, event, or institution. Just as important for Emile Betti, the Italian historian of law (who seems to have fathered this line of thought in Hirsch), and for Hirsch himself, was the fact that meaning is *determined* and fixed according to those assertions that the author wished to make, while applications are always multiple, *indeterminate*, and only valid to the degree that they preserve the integrity of the principle found within the fixed or determined meaning. Therefore, in the name of doing *phronesis* and application, we do not wish to swing the pendulum all the way to the opposite side, thereby abandoning meaning as it was set forth by the original speaker or writer. Gadamer's writings have called to our attention the tragedy of neglecting applications, or of merely attaching them as a subsequent or occasional part of the understanding process. But neither can we delete the assertions of the writer—not unless we wish ultimately to lose the whole possibility of communicating to one another, much less of communicating from one era or culture to another.

Admittedly, there is another aspect of the current hermeneutical revolution that has brought enormous easing of tensions in theological scholarship; it is the admission that our pre-understandings do tend to shape our approach to the problem of meaning and understanding at all levels of the search for meaning. However, at some point this hermeneutical circle, or spiral of prejudices and pre-judgments, these pre-understandings must be put on the table for evaluation and validation. Such *Vorverständnis* not only functions in the capacity of questions that we put to texts and events, wherein our understanding is progressively refined and reformulated, but at some point in this process even our prejudices and what we bring to the interpretive process from our heritages and cultures must be judged by truth standards within that realm of discourse. Once again the swing of the pendulum is too severe, for all at once there is a tendency to swing from the assured results of a confident, objective, scientific Enlightenment-like rationality to a subjective complacency that admits all views on an equal level as an equal party to the truth without requiring more than that these prejudices or pre-understandings function as the set from which we view and question the theological problem or biblical text at hand. It appears that the pendulum has swung too far for the good of all partners in the conversation. In the name of pluralism we have demanded that truth be quiescent.

One of the main reasons why the relationship between religious studies and theological studies has not been clarified as yet rests in this whole area of hermeneutics. The search for “method” and “objectivity” cannot be equated

totally with Paul Ricoeur's metaphor of "distance." While an older rationalism of modernity was more optimistic about the possibility of achieving such objectivity through certain realms of science, some forms of postmodernity have not been able to shake off all vestiges of its older alliances. Browning alludes to such when he affirms, "Here, the canons of objectivity arising from the social sciences and historical studies must be respected even if reframed in new ways . . ." "So, all of a sudden, there is a point where distance alone does not solve the quest for objectivity! Our only question would be this: Why limit the search for canons of objectivity to the social sciences and historical studies? Especially in the realm of theological discourse? Surely there are more canons of objectivity to be introduced than just these two.

This raises an important point: How can the totality of a theological education be embraced within such a hermeneutical exercise? Is this not the essence of the reductionistic approach that has widened the rift between religious studies and theological studies? Without denying some of the better insights of recent hermeneutical theory, churches and their communities of scholars appear to be contending that contemporary hermeneutical exercises simply do not go far enough in aiding the interpretive processes of theology. Instead of emphasizing "epistemological distance," as Browning does, seminaries and divinity schools are calling for *epistemological engagement* as theology's primary function in faith and learning. To contend that only the degree of distance differentiates religious and theological scholarship would be to adopt just the opposite posture that some of those, whom the departments of theology wish to serve, have wanted.

How is such a search possible within the contexts of a confessional group of scholars who affirm religious commitments, while at the same time assert just as vigorously that they are in favor of academic freedom? Are not these two concepts in total opposition? If anything, objectivity and the search for things as they really are seem to be seriously compromised by those trying to carry both of these buckets (academic freedom and religious commitments).

The Rootedness of Freedom in Truth

Those in theological studies are quick to answer in the words of Christ that "You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). There is no freedom without truth and truth cannot be pursued without freedom. Furthermore, a freedom that permits itself to dispense with the question of truth can only be a false and illusory freedom.

So how shall we define "freedom"? At its elementary levels, freedom is the absence of physical constraint, e.g., when a balloon rises without impediments

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or a stone falls freely. But at the higher levels of discussing freedom for individuals, freedom demands the absence of psychological compulsion, so that I can flee when I am endangered and duck when I am suddenly confronted with a foreign object.⁸ More importantly, in the realm of human freedom, if that freedom is not used in the service of common good, such freedom is meaningless and self-destructive, as it is either reduced to a solipsism, or in the extreme, to anarchy.

How can a society, much less the academy, be directed by truth if its concept of the common good and public consensus can be overridden by a majority that expresses little or no interest in the truth? Only the concept that individuals are made in the image of God can rescue us from our own bondage, or that of other groups, classes, nations, or ideologies. "Where such a transcendent source of human dignity is denied, the way lies open for totalitarianism and other forms of despotism, in which naked power takes over, so that the interests of a particular person or group are imposed on the rest of society."⁹

If some still protest, "there is no freedom unless there is freedom to act contrary to so-called transcendent truth as well," the answer is at hand. When persons act against transcendent truth, they act also against what is good, right, just, fair, and beautiful in such ways as instituting slavery, or forming totalitarian forms of government, and the like. Ultimately they damage or destroy their own freedom. Just as a society forfeits its freedoms when it fails to respect personal dignity, so individuals do the same when they try to liberate themselves from moral norms and the state of things as they are in and of themselves.

For example, on the societal level, a public consensus is not the same thing as a majority opinion. John Courtney Murray explained in *We Hold These Truths*, that according to classical tradition of political thought, consensus is a doctrine or judgment that commands public agreement because of the merits of the arguments in its favor.¹⁰ It is basically a moral conception that is tutored by truth and practical wisdom. A majority vote never set the terms or the limits of truth. Likewise, the notion of public consensus was predicated on the expectation that the public would acknowledge the merits of the arguments set forth on behalf of certain principles or judgments.

The "crisis of truth," to which Pope John Paul II referred in *Veritatis Splendor* (32) was further defined in *Centesimus Annus* (46):

Nowadays there is a tendency to claim that agnosticism and skeptical relativism are the philosophy and the basic attitude which correspond to democratic forms of political life. Those who are convinced that they know the truth and firmly adhere to it are considered unreliable from a democratic point of view, since they do not accept that truth is determined by the majority

or that it is subject to variation according to different political trends.

Is it also true that there is no place left for truth in the theological academy? Why should even the discussion of this topic bring such a severe reaction among theological colleagues? It is time we were freed from some of our own cultural captivities on this question.

The suggestion made here is not that anyone knows anything comprehensively or has a special corner on the truth. All that is contended here is that it is possible to grasp *some* of the truth, even though we make mistakes and often must change our minds. Our beliefs must not be placed in permanent suspension and in the same category as private opinions, for the only thing worth believing is the truth.

The Present Impasse

Browning finds it impossible to define the nature and criteria of scholarship in theological education at the present time without, at the same time, locating theological education in relation to religious studies.¹¹ But it is here that we find the admission that theological studies have indeed often been overwhelmed by criteria from religious studies, most frequently criteria that were often governed by every other discipline but theology, frequently judged to be more “scientific,” “historical,” and “critical” than what theology could do in and of itself.

Was this not the embarrassing charge that Thomas C. Oden made? He opined:

Each discipline of theological education, now awash in dated enlightenment assumptions, finds itself desperately seeking an alternative to the premises of Trinitarian reasoning, incarnation, resurrection, and scriptural revelation . . . [T]he pattern of the so-called scientific study of religion has gradually flooded the seminary, discipline by discipline . . . Here is where the reductionistic empirical and rational methods of enlightenment modernity have infested the sanctuaries of theological education.¹²

Accordingly, the question must be asked: Are the thematic tests (whose definitions are not given in the paper being examined here) that Browning proposes adequate to distinguish what is “authentic” from “inauthentic,” and sufficient to guide any particular religious tradition?¹³ Theology is, in part, about making judgments, but the issue of authority and truth once again are deleted from the discourse. Why is this so? How can they be deleted when the commu-

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nity of faith expects more of her thinkers in this area than she has traditionally received.

The failure of many religious studies programs to reckon with the distinctiveness of theological method, as compared with historical, philosophical, literary, or psychological methods of inquiry, has led to such a homogenization of theological method that the main object of inquiry can hardly be recognized as the study of God. Once again, the stinging rebuke of Oden is worth recalling:

... [M]uch of what has been studied in liberated religion under the heading of "theology" has nothing whatsoever to do with God or God's revelation or God's church or the worship of God There is no assumed requirement that "theo"logy thus conceived need have anything to do with the revealed God . . . All this under liberated rules is called theology.¹⁴

Even allowing for a fair amount of hyperbole, Oden surely penetrates to the heart of our problem of the nature and criteria of theological scholarship. It is time that both religious studies programs and departments of theology in seminaries come to terms with the fact that theology is, as Oden pleads in that same context, a unique academic enterprise with its own distinct subject matter—God; its own methodological premise—revelation; its own method of inquiry into its unique subject matter—the exegesis of the revealed word of God; its own criteria of accountability—responsible handling of the biblical text within the context of the witness of the Holy Spirit and the conciliar work of the church over the ages; its own way of analyzing culture—with an appreciation of divine providence and an appropriate bracketing of worldly powers; and its own logic—an internal consistency with the revealed truth of God verified by all the external evidences from natural revelation including the historical, logical, literary, existential, and scientific.¹⁵

Such a description of the nature and criteria for doing theology should not appear to be any more remarkable, continued Oden, than requiring that study in a department of mathematics should demand that talk not be about social criticism or drama, but about things like theorems and equations of arithmetic. For close to three decades now, too many "shirttail" subjects to theology and extraneous methodologies have been masquerading as legitimate substitutes for the decent study of theology. This has contributed in no small way to our present crisis and dilemma. However, one of the most hopeful signs is that we are now able to talk openly about this situation.

In the meantime, the vacuum that was created when the Biblical Theology Movement was declared to be moribund, was quickly filled by such a plethora of methodologies and subjects that no single definition for what constituted

theology, or how it was to be done, could fit all that has grown up in the interim. Such latitudinarianism could not be exalted as a new mark of triumph for openness in theological inquiry. Rather, what had at first been thought to be a new openness to the fresh winds of scholarship eventually turned out to be near anarchy and a total loss of the subject matter itself. God himself died, not under the scrutiny of the scholar's magnifying glass, but from sheer neglect and total avoidance of the object of almost all study. And now with the collapse of modernity, in these days of postmodernity, mortals themselves are practically in a state of *rigor mortis*.

More is at stake than the issue of definitions. Is it true, as Browning seems to assume, that students arrive at our institutions with a particular religious tradition "already . . . shaped"¹⁶ in them? Is it also true that for a vast majority of students today, this would be a gratuitous assumption? All too many aspiring scholars in the field of theology have minimalistic understandings and appreciations of any theological or ecclesiastical orientation prior to their enrollment in programs of religious or theological study. Let it also be said, that from most theological perspectives, religious formation is never complete at any stage in life; instead, it invites persons with demonstrated gifts of understanding and aspirations to enter into this formative process as a life-time calling. The demands and commitments for such a life-long program of scholarly inquiry are not fully described or expected in theological programs as they once were when the "parson" was known to be among the best educated in town because he or she had given over his or her life to study as a pattern of living.

The Scholarly Tasks of Theology

Browning lists four scholarly tasks for the purpose of "cultural and religious reconstruction": (1) descriptive studies, (2) historical studies, (3) critical studies, and (4) strategic or practical studies. But will the mastery of this list of tasks produce Christian theologians, and will their co-workers in theological education be ready to exercise spiritual leadership in guiding the life of the contemporary church? Has the "reconstruction" here so outdistanced what it was seeking to serve that the object of its services no longer recognizes the gifts proffered to it?

To be specific, nowhere has Browning acknowledged what most theologians in the history of Christianity would have deemed most essential, i.e., that theology is talk about God as it is recovered from the revelation of God in Scripture. Rather than beginning with a description that is "thick" with "questions and problems resident in [the individual's and group's] situations—questions that should be addressed theologically,"¹⁷ a "thick" foundation ought

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to be laid in the proper object (God) and materials (revelation) of theology. Only after this basis for theological discourse has been established, can the questions and concerns from a diversity of contexts come into view with a distinctive contribution from theology. Otherwise, the discussion could be carried on apart from any supposed religious horizon—as indeed it has tended to occur in the past three decades in many departments of theology and religious studies.

“[T]he central resources of the Christian tradition” are subjected apparently, according to Browning’s second type of scholarly tasks, only to historical inquiry. But why this limitation? Especially since it is charged with “the central resources” of our tradition? Is any place left in religious studies for conciliar, confessional, biblical, or ecclesial theology? It is precisely at this point where the much discussed pending rupture between the seminary and the church has been exasperated. To put the question even more precisely: Will the concerns of confessional and churchly theology really be welcomed in the typical religious studies program? Or is the need for critical distance so important to the scholarly task that it would warrant its substitution for subjects and methods thought to be traditionally connected with the scholarly task?

The call for both internal and external critical reflection on the central themes of the Christian tradition is at once encouraging and alarming. At first, it appeared that the test for truth would make an appearance in the halls of theological scholarship after all; alas, however, it turns out that this test is closer to “certain forms of pragmatism.” Though we are assured that “there are ways to gain relative degrees of distance from our embeddedness in these situations,”¹⁸ none of them was outlined except to suggest that science, reason, and experience are able to give “fragmentary ways” of testing and refining our theology. Does this mean that the theological disciplines have nothing unique to offer by way of content or procedures?

We feel differently, however, about the matter of the so-called strategic studies, or practical theology. Here we found ourselves in full agreement with Browning that practical theology should be “integrally related to the entire cycle of theological education.”¹⁹ Our only caveat would be to demur over the assertion that “application drives” the understanding process from the beginning, thereby giving us the practice-theory-practice model. This takes us back to the hermeneutical problem mentioned above, i.e., that the author’s intentionality and the discipline’s right to set the agenda for the terms of study are offset by the role of strategic studies, now being given a codeterminative emphasis in the meaning process. Nevertheless, the older theory-practice dichotomy is also unacceptable. Rather than having separate moments for either theory or practice, it would be much better to have both practice and theory interpenetrating each other and both going on simultaneously, much as theological education originally was practiced in the manse and parsonage prior to its institutionaliza-

tion in the 18th and 19th centuries in the colleges and seminaries of Canada and the United States.

Definition of Theological Scholarship

Browning has striven mightily to identify for the theological community just what constitutes excellent scholarship in our common task. The argument is that it is the intersection and complex use of all four types of theological studies he has outlined: the descriptive, the historical, the critical, and the strategic or practical. Along with these tasks, he calls for the use of various empirical disciplines, including sociology, psychology, anthropology, and economics. While Browning assures us that such studies are never “independent of Christian horizons,” or “totally independent of practical questions,”²⁰ it all begins to sound somewhat patronizing to what is “genuinely theological,” or even biblical, in our distinctive task.

In the drive to set acceptable standards for scholarly excellence, a goal to which almost everyone in the theological enterprise aspires, suddenly we are introduced to “the canons of objectivity arising from the social sciences and historical studies.”²¹ Why must theology be harnessed with these disciplines as the first order of academic achievement in order to prove its legitimacy or scholarly character? And why call these the canons of *objectivity* after apparently resisting the exercise of the criteria of truth in setting forth the orienting nature of hermeneutics? To say that these are the “rules governing excellence in descriptive and historical studies”²² seems to set the boundaries of acceptable theological work solely under these two areas of public recognition that bring their own set of criteria and character to the enterprise. Why is it that theology cannot first declare what she is, or is not, based on the criteria and terms of her own turf as a first order of business?

Browning appears to conclude on exactly this kind of concessive note by asserting that:

Criteria for accreditation and criteria governing financial awards or grants should view theological scholarship as genuinely theological, and not historical, descriptive or even normative in some nontheological way What distinguishes a type or style of theological scholarship is the moment or step [sic] in which it specializes, even though the other moments are present to varying degrees in the background.²³

What is meant by denying theology normativity “in some nontheological way” is unclear, but the rest of what is affirmed here is right on the mark. It recognizes what we had been hoping would be said throughout this essay: Yes, “Theologi-

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cal scholarship is an integrated reflective process²⁴ specializing in its own type and style of scholarship. The other four moments of interrelated scholarship are here properly consigned to the “background,” even though they previously seemed to have occupied a preemptive and defining role in determining what was scholarly and excellent in our craft.

It is precisely this type of readjustment that evangelicals believe is necessary, for they share a general discontent with the failed Enlightenment methods as a determination for what passes as being scholarly and what does not. Indeed, it is true that:

The postmodern critique of hermeneutical criticism (as seen in Peter Stuhlmacher, Martin Hinge, Eta Linnemann, Brevard Childs) stands poised to speak of the normative canon and the plain sense of Scripture The richest examples of classic Protestant hermeneutics (such as Martin Chemnitz, Abraham Calovius, John Quenstedt, Johann Gerhard, Martin Bucer, John Owen, Jonathan Edwards, John Wesley, and Charles Finney) were keen observers and critics of speculative historical approaches that violate the text Postmodern evangelical consciousness does not cower or recoil from this methodological fray as did pietism. It is willing to play devil’s advocate, to enter the critical debate, and to stand ready when necessary to announce that the emperor (in this case the uncritical knowledge elite) has no clothes.²⁵

It is more than strange that both this Council on Theological Scholarship and Research and indeed The Association of Theological Schools should be tackling the issues of standards and criteria of excellence in the very generation that has all but declared that such searches that imply an objectivity and or any type of normativity are no longer available to postmodern persons. But if excellence is to be achieved in our common enterprise and if definitions have any force whatsoever, both this Council and the Association must, in a certain sense, be considered counter-culture at this juncture.

Therefore let it be affirmed that the nature of theological scholarship will include the following: theology has its own distinctive subject matter—God; its own distinctive starting point and source of subject material—revelation; its unique method of examining its subject matter—exegesis of the Scripture in light of the witness of all the evidences, historical, cultural, scientific along with the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit; and its own criteria of scholarly excellence—accountability to the canonical text and the work of the conciliar councils in the history of the church.²⁶ While theology also employs the validating process of internal consistency with revealed truth, it is not to say that it may disregard

all other tests and forms of logic. It only objects to being defined out of existence by such preemptive strictures as the elimination of the supernatural from the discussion.

What is called for here is that the drought of the absence of God from theological discussion should be ended—especially, in the name of excellence in theological scholarship. Moreover, the level of engagement in which theological research is carried on must be no less than that of any of its departmental peers in the university—all evidence and all facts bearing on the issues discussed and studied must be engaged. Even though theology carries its own brand of unique methodology, subject matter, and criteria, just as every other discipline does, it must not request a special exemption from her involvement in the full array of methods and disciplines in the academy. Neither must it think itself such an academic orphan that it must jettison its own distinctiveness in order to gain visibility and acceptance in the host schools. After all, most of these universities began with theology having a central role when they were founded, so why should they be overly apologetic for its reappearance on the scene? In more recent times, theology has tried to climb back on board at the university, only to be often rebuffed for also espousing confessional attachments, or for too frequently coming out at the end of its research at some of the same points where it entered the argument—as if this same state of affairs did not occasionally happen for many non-confessing participants in the university's other disciplines.

What makes religious studies scholarly is exactly what makes theological studies worthy of the same encomium. Once the distinctives of the subject have been taken into account, and that aspect of modern hermeneutics accounted for, the tests for excellence are the same as those for any other educational and scholarly enterprise.

ENDNOTES

1. See Browning's essay in this volume, 4.
2. Thomas C. Oden, *Requiem: A Lament in Three Movements* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 93, speaks of "the distinctive modern ecumenical sin: disdain for evangelicals" in his chapter on "The McGovernization of Ecumenical Gridlock."
3. See, for example, the thesis of George M. Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (New York: Oxford, 1994).
4. James Smart, *The Past, Present, and Future of Biblical Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979), 94-95.
5. Browning, *op. cit.*, 2.
6. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 289 as cited by Browning, 6.

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7. Browning, *op. cit.*, 9.
8. These distinctions and the general thrust of what follows owes much to the article by Avery Dulles, "John Paul and the Truth about Freedom," *First Things* 55 (Aug/Sept 1995):36-41.
9. *Ibid.*, 40.
10. John Courtney Murray, *We Hold These Truths* (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1985).
11. Browning, *op. cit.*, 4.
12. Oden, *Requiem*, 63.
13. Browning, *op. cit.*, 5.
14. Oden, *Requiem*, 44.
15. Similar conclusions are reached in the vast literature that has emerged in the last 10 years, most recently summarized by David H. Kelsey in *Between Athens and Berlin: The Theological Education Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993). For example, on page 3 Kelsey notes that: ". . . first . . . the literature reveals deep incoherences in the way theological education is, in actual practice, theologically conceived; and second, that the literature sharply focuses much of what is at stake in different understandings of 'the nature of theology.' "
16. Browning, *op. cit.*, 5.
17. *Ibid.*, 7.
18. *Ibid.*, 8.
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*, 9.
22. *Ibid.*
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*
25. Oden, *Requiem*, 133-34.
26. Modeled, in part, after Oden, *Requiem*, 43-44.

An African American Perspective on the Nature and Criteria of Theological Scholarship

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Don Browning has written a very thought-provoking paper that ought to stimulate vigorous discussion among those who are concerned with theological scholarship and research. I have been asked to comment upon it from an African American perspective. Such a task can only be done incompletely because the African American community and religious tradition are very diverse in cultural, national, and religious backgrounds. Moreover, like much of the United States and Canada, they are affected by many changes resulting from new immigrations, large-scale social and economic change, new quests for identity demanding a return to some lost past, reinvention of the individual and communal self, and unification of the racial/ethnic group in the face of growing differences in class, religion, and culture. African American religious and theological scholarship is consequently more varied than ever before. This phenomenon will likely continue for some time because of the growing number of intellectuals and scholars and their increased opportunity to acquire a voice of their own in print or the media if not in the university or theological seminary. Michael W. Harris's review of African American religious history in the 1980s provides a glimpse of this growing body of scholarship.¹ The increased interaction among people of African ancestry and with non-African people is sure to enlarge and sustain this visible presence of African American religions.

From one perspective the dynamic nature of African American experience in culture and religion makes a response to Browning's paper, as requested, an impossibility for one who desires to speak in a comprehensive manner about African American religious experience. It is possible, nevertheless, to say with full confidence that few African Americans would frame the task of theological scholarship and research as he does, because for them more is askew than the conflict between the styles of scholarship in theological and religious studies. This is a very important issue made urgent by the resistance to change on the part of some, the need to perpetuate schools of thought and programs of study, and the concern of religious scholars for respectability among intellectuals, elites, and secular scholars. Nonetheless, I believe most African Americans would see Browning's approach as one that ignores their religious tradition, its contribu-

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tions, and the need for research by all scholars in its areas of concern. The application or practices he seems to seek in his theological reflection is the shoring up of the traditions of mainstream white, Western culture and religion. From the perspective of most African Americans, things begin to go astray with the statement of the hermeneutic theory. The theory is put forward, it appears, in order to establish the fact that religious studies is not significantly more objective than theological scholarship and that both can only be partially objective or scientific.² The Enlightenment is to be set aside and scholars are to become more complacent and content with their pre-judgments and more willing to narrow the distance between themselves and their texts, events, monuments, and the traditions of Western civilization and the great themes of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. For all of those who are not members of the privileged scholarly classes and religious elites, this conclusion is too simplistic and takes too lightly the fact that pre-judgments too frequently reflect the worst evils of an age or civilization and are not easily uprooted by dialogue among those who, in most instances, profit from their continuation. To African Americans the theory does not give much promise of examining one of the core pre-judgments of Western culture, texts, and religion—namely white supremacy.

Cornel West among many has pointed out how the Enlightenment metaphors, notions, categories, and norms of modern discourse, together with the ideas of observation and evidence, projected and promoted white supremacy.³ It was during this period of modernity that African Americans were formed as a people and that the traditions and effective histories of many Western individuals, scholars, communities and nations came into being. Any theory that acknowledges the embeddedness of its practitioners in this culture defined by white supremacy should seek to call for a correction of the theory rather than speak simply of pre-judgments. This is because the hermeneutic fails to challenge the white supremacy that distorts the method and epistemology of modernity, and it ignores the fact that African Americans, a people created in the West, possess an African ancestry and have an effective history and religious tradition that is larger than the West. For Browning the non-Western portion of the religious tradition is invisible and of no importance except perhaps as a pollutant of the West. African Americans would agree that human understandings embody prejudices, that they are engaged, situated, historically conditioned, and dialogical. But they would be more skeptical than Browning about how questions are refined and reformulated, how the qualities of dialogue and play are improved by the recognition of our effective histories. As “critical distance becomes more modest in its ambitions, more relative to its own beginning points, and, indeed less heroic,”⁴ it may also become more accepting of the evils and sins in the West, especially white supremacy. Indeed the concept

of distance, like that of reason, tends to undermine the notion that our boundaries may be artificial and imprisoning as well as hurtful to others. The element of partial engagement and interest on the part of the scholar should not be accepted as an unambiguous good. It must be seen as needing recognition but also criticism and often correction, because it permits not only valid religious confessions and creeds but also invalid convictions about race and patriarchy. Hermeneutic theory in the view of African Americans needs to do more than inform us that we are self-interested and self-preferring participants in the traditions that we inherit. The theory needs to embrace the goal of justice for all. This is not clear with the concept of distance, and in Browning's essay there appears to be an apologetic for a privileging of white mainstream cultural and religious norms. African Americans desire a religious and theological method of scholarship that provides in theoretical formulations and styles of scholarship equal space for African American religious traditions as it does for European-dominated understandings of Judaism and Christianity.

Browning's willingness to join Islam to Judaism and Christianity is a bit puzzling to me. Is this because of the contributions of Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes or is it because of the recent immigration and growth occurring in America? In any case, it is difficult to see why Islam appears to be privileged over the African American religious and cultural traditions that have greatly influenced and shaped Western culture, religion, and civilization. If the suggestion is that African American religious traditions are to enter the research programs through the agency of students rather than that of teachers and scholars, most of whom will be white, then the Browning prospectus is both poor scholarship planning and condescending, for it imprisons all citizens of the United States of America and Canada in a conception of Western culture that is frozen by some arbitrary selection of texts, largely European in origin. Moreover, it isolates the West from significant influence from outside cultures. The West, in this conception, is also impoverished by the failure to acknowledge the ways in which African American religious traditions have helped shape Western institutions and culture. Browning's approach thus limits pluralism and multiculturalism in a fashion that undermines true scholarship and distorts the Christian themes of love, justice, and universalism. Its practical agenda appears to be more concerned with the preservation of one stage of Western culture and religion than the enhancement of religious studies and theological scholarship.

African American religious and theological scholars can be more content with the four reflective moments than with the hermeneutic. If, however, it is only at the stage of reflective moments that the diversity of contexts comes into view, African American religious traditions will discover themselves already to have been defined by the pre-judgments and limited distancing of the non-

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African American scholars from their texts. The continuation of such research and scholarship will result in the continuing marginalization of African American religious and theological studies. If one begins with white supremacy, then there is little to choose between a practice-theory-practice model and a theory-practice model.

Once the pre-judgments and notions of distancing have been corrected, African American scholars would accept the standards or canons of excellence that might govern the different styles of scholarship. They also would be more eager than Browning to exclude white supremacy from the “genuinely theological.”⁵

Some Constructive Suggestions

Having indicated what I believe African Americans would see as sanctioning of efforts to improve scholarship and research on their religious traditions, I would like now to recommend for consideration a few things that might make Browning’s suggestions more palatable. African Americans generally endorse the efforts to increase the cooperation between religious studies and theological education. This is due to the fact that theological education, whether mainstream or evangelical, has usually been hostile to all forms of African American religion and has deemed it unworthy of serious reflection. This is often true of religious studies, but in general its approaches and methods have been more open and much of the investigation and reflection upon the primary data of African American faith and practices has been undertaken by social scientists, historians, and religious studies scholars. This has been especially true in respect to the traditional religions of Africa and the manner in which they have been incorporated into the Christian faith or have given birth to new highly Christianized faith orientations. Unfortunately this is not true for the majority of theological education. One needs only to read the writings of the theologians to see how widespread is the dismissal of African American religions and theologies. A more serious effort to deal with white supremacy might lead theological scholars to reflect upon why it is that this body of religious experience never appeals to their imagination and is missing from their research and scholarly endeavors. If they were to become interested in correcting this omission they, like some of their students, might explore the resources for theology to be found in African American preaching, music, literature, and history. What has happened in some programs of religious studies with respect to African American religion might be the best indicator for guiding the most fruitful cooperation in research and scholarship between the two areas of study.

The heart of hermeneutic theory is perhaps the interpretation of texts and events. Sensitivity to the white supremacy embedded in modernity, and which

persists as a part of the effective history of most postmodern scholars, can be helpful in enabling some scholars to appreciate better and to evaluate more adequately the traditions of others. One requires African American texts and events if one is to make Christian, Jewish, and Islamic traditions whole. I am unable to specify the exact texts and events that ought to be selected or that should be judged classical. Even if I could designate them, the present controversy about the proper canons for college and university curricula points to the difficulties one would have in getting African American materials accepted as “genuinely theological.” Given that my selections may not be the best and that their acceptance might be very difficult, let me suggest three biblical passages and two events for consideration. I choose biblical texts because they are authoritative for most African Americans. The events are selected because they have had a decisive effect upon Western religions and culture.

The texts are the Exodus story, Psalm 68:31, and Isaiah 53. They illustrate what is needed to make the hermeneutic theory under consideration more adequate. African Americans understand them to refer to God’s participation in their experience of slavery and freedom, their longing for a reestablishment of a lost relationship to Africa, and the continuing hope for leadership that will bring civic justice and equality. Albert Raboteau discusses their use throughout African American history in his excellent essay, “African-Americans: Exodus, Ethiopia, and Racial Messianism” and indicates how their interpretations led African Americans to distinguish their conception of religion from those of European Americans.⁶

The Exodus story and its many themes concerning God’s justice and mercy is well known because of the concern in our day for liberation movements. Its history as an African American religious tradition is less well known and has been under-utilized in theological education. Too frequently the African American understanding has been shunted aside while the understanding of European Americans, Latin Americans, and others has been enthusiastically embraced and investigated.

Psalm 68:31, as Raboteau states, is more elusive and obscure yet precisely because of that fact more widely used to construct redeemer theologies of history and to contribute to pan-African and cultural nationalist movements as late as the 1960s and the 1970s. The concern of some today to revise the accepted histories of Egyptian and Greek civilizations as well as that of the West may be better understood by looking at African American interpretations of this passage.

My reference to Isaiah 53 is a narrowed statement of what Raboteau discusses under the rubric of racial messianism. Raboteau discusses African American appropriations of Jewish and Islamic teaching. I wish, as an example of a possible classical text, to direct attention only to the teachings concerning

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redemptive suffering and the African American claim that it is universal. If I am correct in my judgments about the hermeneutic theory of Browning, texts such as these need to be employed in order to help eliminate white supremacy from research and scholarship. Albert Raboteau, who has spent his career in religious studies programs, is also an excellent example of how religious studies can be supportive of, even indispensable to, theological education.

It is equally difficult to pick events that would be chosen almost unanimously by African Americans as central to their religious tradition and that would be of similar significance to theological education. The first of the two events that might meet this test are the cluster of happenings that led to the division of most American churches over slavery (and the failure of the Roman Catholic and Protestant Episcopal Church to divide) and the establishment of independent African American churches. The second event is the participation of the churches in the civil rights movement associated with Martin Luther King, Jr. There is, of course, much else that might merit attention but I have selected these two because they offer clear views of how the whole of American religious life has been distorted by the belief in and practice of white supremacy. The existence of independent African American churches and distinctive theologies is due to the European American's refusal to accept African Americans as fully human persons made in God's image. Biblical and theological arguments were fashioned to justify the practices of the churches and to legitimate white supremacy in every aspect of societal life, including the academy and seminary. Only with reluctance were African Americans permitted to become Christians, and after becoming members of the faith they were subject to unequal status and separated from white persons. Equality and unity were the rare exception, not the rule. In spite of enslavement and unjust treatment, African Americans became Christians because they perceived Christianity differently from European Americans. In Christianity they saw the affirmation of their humanity and desire for freedom, a theodicy that affirmed the triumph of good over evil, and a faith that bestowed union with God.⁷ This set of convictions resulted in the creation of independent African American churches. Because these two institutional arrangements still exist and their theological justification persists in the effective histories of contemporary worshipers and scholars, all religious studies and theological scholarship needs to take seriously the task of eliminating white supremacy.

Change has taken place since the racial division of the churches in the 1800s and the nation's engagement in the Civil War. Yet the period of Reconstruction gave rise not to racial reconciliation but rather to a period of legal and *de facto* segregation and discrimination that perpetuated the white supremacy embodied in the Enlightenment metaphors, notions, categories, and norms of modern

discourse. The churches, religious studies and theological scholars, and academic institutions adjusted their teachings to these orientations. Although there were always erratic and episodic challenges to these teachings, no sustained attack was made upon white supremacy until the Civil Rights era. The African American churches under the leadership of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference played a major part in this effort. Their activities on behalf of racial equality and justice constitute the second event that needs to be the subject of reflection by hermeneutic theory. The event is crucial because it discloses the continued existence of white supremacy and its ability to withstand criticism and resistance. Our superficial knowledge of and, for some, participation in these events should make us keenly aware of the difficulties posed for objectivity and distancing procedures. The number of other important happenings before the Civil Rights era ended, such as the Vietnam War; the advent of the women's, the third world, and the sexual orientation movements; the revolutions in medicine, biology, and genetics, should make us aware of how short a period of time was given to serious reflection on white supremacy. Our omission needs correction for in the Civil Rights era will be found the heart of the African American understanding of God, of humankind, and of the Christian faith. This, I might add, is a Western religious tradition informed by African roots. As with all traditions, it is not the fullness of truth. Its understanding of dignity and equality is blurred by patriarchy but it does expand the visions contained in white Western conceptions of Christianity and Judaism. I cannot address Islam at this time because of the complexity found among African Americans who consider themselves to be Islamic.

African American scholars, I am confident, believe that if a hermeneutic theory is to serve as a guide for theological scholarship, it must do more than enable religious studies and theological scholarship and research to be more compatible. It must, in addition, discover a way for both to recognize their addiction to white supremacy and institute procedures to eliminate it. This is extremely important because a failure to do so means the giving of one's consent to tribal religions that keep alive and make more vicious the enmity and hatred among peoples. The major religious traditions among African Americans have always sought to acknowledge the sacredness and humanity of all persons, and their scholars believe that this goal should define the nature and criteria of theological scholarship. In their understanding, anything less than this is not "genuinely theological."

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ENDNOTES

1. Michael W. Harris, "African American Religious History in the 1980s: A Critical Review," *Religious Studies Review* 20/4 (1994); 263-75.
2. See Browning's essay in this volume, 5.
3. Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance—An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), 50-51.
4. Browning, *op. cit.*, 3.
5. *Ibid.*, 8.
6. Albert J. Raboteau, "African-Americans: Exodus, Ethiopia, and Racial Messianism," in *Many Are Chosen*, eds. William R. Hutchison and Hartmut Lehmann, Harvard Theological Studies (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 175-95.
7. West, 35.

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I take Don Browning's argument to be that the supposed "unsolvable tension, if not an outright conflict, between styles of scholarship in religious studies and styles of scholarship in theological studies" is misplaced. Using a kind of "broad sweep" of hermeneutics (Heidegger-Gadamer-Ricoeur), Browning argues that all scholarship relating to religion contains a way of reflective understanding.¹ I have great appreciation for this attempt to delineate a kind of meta-theory of academic practice, and I think that it is important to name what those of us in theological studies and in religious studies have, or in this case, *do* in common. I also want to affirm Browning's effort to delineate an intellectual framework in which to address the nature and criteria of theological scholarship.

Indeed, I want to follow Browning's lead in developing an intellectual framework for discussion of theological scholarship by exploring, from the perspective of feminist theology, other factors in the present situation that affect the nature and criteria of scholarship. My response to Browning is a kind of both/and response in the sense that I want to provide a supplemental naming of the situation. The crucial difference between my paper and Browning's is that I think (perhaps believe) that the present and future of our common good in theological studies require a way of living with categorical differences whose tensions are solved neither by insisting upon only a common essence nor by going radically separate ways.

I want to affirm the necessity for hermeneutics, but argue that it cannot and should not be made the only intellectual framework or meta-theory to adjudicate all differences. I will argue that there are arenas in which hermeneutics cannot adequately name, and that the present situation is characterized by a need to cultivate a scholarly community that can live with multiple theoretical claims and commitments. I want to suggest that there is another option other than, as Richard Bernstein puts it, the grand Either/Or of a common rationality or the belief that such a rationality is an illusion.² I think we can find scholarship styles that use our differences—in styles, in methods, in subject matters, in religion, in areas of scholarship—to enrich our work together. My vision of the future is one not so much of a conversing only through a complex rhythm of distance and belonging to one's subject matter, but also of conversing through a rich jazz improvisation where we are continually creating and recreating rhythm and harmony. Indeed I will add a counterpoint to Browning's rhythm

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and suggest that the best scholarship can occur as we enable distinct lines to develop and empower interwoven relations. So to Browning's simple rhythm of distance and belonging, I add the counterpoint of Bach, or bluegrass, or even a jazz ensemble. This is not to deny the importance of rhythm, but to surround it with a rich fullness of range, style, and creativity.

Or, using a metaphor more to my taste, I think we can create a future to our scholarly life together that is like a rich banquet of many different foods, symbolic activities, and reasons for being there. To that end, let me begin with a brief story: Several years ago at Emory University, a conference was held on world religions. This conference was geared toward teaching about and dialogue among the many diverse religious groups represented on Emory's campus. The planning groups contained representatives from the various religious groups and representatives from the Chaplain's Department, Candler School of Theology, and the Religion Department. Things were fine, almost everyone was polite, until it came time to figure out the eating arrangements. All sorts of problems ensued. Would there be a kosher kitchen? Would there be allowances made for the dietary restrictions of different Muslim groups? How would the vegetarianism of the Sikhs be coordinated with the vegetarianism of the eco-feminists? How could we avoid the problem of respecting certain groups opposition to women in religious leadership roles (such as blessing the food) and of respecting feminist Jews and Christians demanding equal voice and power? Who would sit by whom? Could or should we put all the fundamentalists together, or should we mix persons by religions groups? Some religious groups might like sitting with scholars who studied them; others would be appalled!

One person in the planning group, when faced with the plethora of categorically different questions and the attempt to juggle different objects in different ways, kept observing, "But everyone is just eating." And the campus chaplain kept saying, "Yes, that is correct but there is more to it than that." Questions about what the food symbolizes must be considered. The whole arena of who is more important than whom in the various religious hierarchies must be thought about. Questions of ritual purity that might lead not only to offense but what Julia Kristeva has called "abjection" must be respected. Questions of invisibility and recognition, of politics and economics had to be settled. We did all have to eat together, and the importance of that, like hermeneutics, helped us understand all the quite different meanings, symbols, power struggles, institutions, and ways of being together that would be entailed in this activity. Even after we understood as much as we could, other things had to be decided and enacted. Noting that we were eating was necessary, but it wasn't sufficient to deal with what was going to happen at the lunch.

And thus I find myself saying yes, absolutely it is interpretation, all the way down! And I also find myself saying with the campus chaplain that day, "There

is more to it than that." Hermeneutics is important—it is a common activity—but it does not fully account for the range of intellectual practices or even, I will contend, for the range of human knowing. Thus, though it is necessary to assert the importance of hermeneutics, it is not sufficient to account fully for the realities of theological and religious scholarship. I want to use feminist theology to identify two other arenas that must be considered in the present situation. Further I want to suggest that in order to live with what I will call an *engaged fallibilistic pluralism* in our scholarly life, we must learn to cultivate some new intellectual values and leading principles for the sake of our common good, and I will provide some suggestions of how feminist theology can contribute to these values and principles.

Feminist Theology

In the United States feminist theology as a late 20th-century discourse arises in the context of two important developments: rapid changes in the lives of women (especially middle-class and working-class women) and the development of women's studies and feminist theory in the academy.³ Women, especially middle-class and working-class women, have experienced revolutionary changes in employment; in sexual, marriage, and family practices; in the ability to control reproduction; and in rising rates of violence. In relation to these tremendous changes in the lives of many women in this country, women's studies and feminist theory developed in the academy. Women's studies draw upon a variety of disciplines to consider a range of questions and issues about women in areas such as the representation of women in literature, the specificity of women's writing, the role of women in various historical eras, and the presence and treatment of women in the professions. Feminist theory, at least for our purposes, considers the construction of gender. By the word "gender" I mean the definition of what it is to be a man or woman, as well as how these definitions are used to distribute value and power in the culture.

Feminist theology develops within this particular historical context of the changes for women with special attention to women in the church and to the religious lives of women. Feminist theology shapes Christian language about God and the world in and through the voices of women in the community, the struggle over gender, and the desire to speak of a God in and through all persons. As such, feminist theology can be best described as a new constellation.⁴ According to Martin Jay's characterization of Adorno and Benjamin's notion, a constellation is "a juxtaposed rather than integrated cluster of changing elements that resist reduction to a common denominator, essential core, or generative first principle."⁵ By calling feminist theology a new theological constellation, I want to insist that there is no essential feminism—it cannot be reduced to

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one particular type of critique or one established definition of women, theology, religion, or God. At the same time, feminist theology can be identified through its construction and employment of certain elements and perspectives. These elements and perspectives include the following: (1) insistence on the importance of specificity, difference, and diversity of women versus sameness, essentialism, and commonness of woman; (2) theoretical investigation into the gender construction of Christianity using both internal and external principles of critique; and (3) the creation of productive discourses of transformation that incorporate various values of embodiment, openness, and connectedness. So, for instance, feminist theologians tend to use epistemological lenses and moral values shaped through connectedness rather than opposition, and invoke values of mutuality rather than autonomy.

I will assume knowledge of basic feminist theological works such as those that experiment with God language or those that investigate the problem of domestic violence. I will also assume (though the assumption worries me a bit more) that most readers recognize that feminists invoke a variety of different theological methods.⁶

I will focus on how feminist theology offers a distinct set of intellectual values and leading principles that can allow us to craft a common good that affirms differences in religions, methods, approaches, practice.⁷ Feminist theology suggests to us a very different way of viewing realities, than that of the dual lens of modernity/postmodernity, with its recurring opposition between either commonness or chaos, either complete commensurability or absolute incommensurability.

Arenas of Scholarly Life

Browning has named the arenas of hermeneutics as the ongoing interpretation of religion as a way to relate religious studies and theological studies and as a way to relate the various disciplines of theological studies. But this is not all that occurs in our scholarly world; I am not sure it is even the most contested arena. I want to identify two other arenas in our present reality, neither of which can be adequately named only through hermeneutics. I want first to identify the arena of power, interest, and knowledge in our intellectual life. Then, secondly, I want to question the privileging of one cognitive-ordering type of epistemology and argue for the arena of multiple ways of knowing.

The first arena in the present institutions of scholarship, which I want to identify, has to do with the relation of power, interests, and knowledge. Using hermeneutics to adjudicate the tensions in this arena may fail to expose how knowledge, interest, and power are related. Feminist theology, along with other

forms of liberation theology and some varieties of poststructuralism, insists that to be “critical” in scholarship is always to be attentive to the social construction of power, interests, and knowledge. For these theories and theologies to be critical means both being reflective (Browning’s “distanciation”) of the underlying presuppositions in thinking, but also being explicit in terms of how knowledge is intricately related to power and interests.

Feminist theology, in its most basic sense, explores how knowledge gets constructed—through images, concepts, and systems—to mask the privileging of men over women. Knowledge, according to feminist theologians, has not just been done *by* a particular group of men, but *for* a particular group of men. It has been to the advantage of this group of men to perpetuate the “natural” recognition that women, and persons of color, are irrational, weak in the mind, too dependent, and not capable of abstract thought. Feminist theologians argue that “Western” epistemology is not the universal, abstract truth it claims to be. Rather, as an ideology, “Western” epistemology functions to oppress and belittle those who are other than the white, privileged men in charge of knowledge. To say that “Western” epistemology is an ideological construct is to remove patriarchy simply from individual intent, and to argue about how knowledge is constructed—what metaphors are used, how to relate knowledge to institutional arrangements, how its theoretical constructs parallel and create cultural and structural hierarchies of power.

Feminist theologians use critical theory to identify the distortions and dysfunctions in knowledge and to identify possibilities of change. Critical theories uncover how discourses construct regimes of domination; how the discourse of men’s “natural” superiority and of women’s “natural” inferiority has functioned to justify the oppression, including the physical battering and rape of women. In feminist critical theory, contextual approaches identify possibilities of change and transformation through analysis of symbolic structures and meanings in relationship to practices, institutions, and social relations.

Feminist theologians use a variety of different styles of critical theory. Some feminist theologians such as Elizabeth Johnson and Kathryn Tanner offer a critical theory form within the traditional texts, arguing that the traditional texts offer their own principles of critique against patriarchal forms of knowledge. Other feminist theologians employ critical theories known as standpoint theories, based upon the distinct experiences of women in this culture. Such standpoint theories may invoke the experience of African American women not only against patriarchy, but also against the racism in white women’s theologies, such as the texts of Jacquelyn Grant and Delores Williams. Still other feminist theologians may use more of a social constructionist approach, focusing upon the contextual claims of feminist practices in the academy, church, and culture,

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such as the work of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Mary McClintock Fulkerson, or myself.

But whatever the style, all these feminist theologians use some type of critical theory in addition to hermeneutics. A critical theory is necessary to cover dynamics of power not revealed in the rhythm of belonging and distance, but shown in distortion and domination. As a meta-theory, critical theory allows us to adjudicate claims of power, interests, and knowledge, asking us who the knowledge benefits, what and how its dominant metaphors are constructed, and which institutional arrangements it benefits and which it suppresses. As a meta-theory, critical theory operates in terms of power dynamics, be they about women and men, European Americans and African Americans, Eurocentrism and colonialism, or the interstructuring of oppression. From the perspective of feminist theology, the present situation of theological scholarship demands the presence of critical theory (or theories) both to be critical in terms of the criterion of theological scholarship and in terms of the present situation of who does theological scholarship and whose interest such scholarship serves. Just as hermeneutics is needed as a meta-theory to name the criterion of scholarship in religious studies and theological studies, as well as to identify the framework of criterion, so also is critical theory needed to analyze the present situation and establish a framework for all scholarship.

One who can help us think through the necessity for both hermeneutics and critical theory is Paul Ricoeur. Ricoeur's argument is that both hermeneutics and ideology critique are necessary and that they even overlap at crucial important points.⁸ Hermeneutics, Ricoeur argues, is always oriented to the past—it helps us ask questions about how the past affects us. Ideology critique is oriented to the future—it helps us address present distortion in hopes of future freedom. Ricoeur suggests that hermeneutics and ideology critique can be understood to require each other for any adequate account of a situation. Still, he calls for a respect of the distinction between hermeneutics and ideology critique. Ricoeur puts it this way:

In sketching this dialectic of the recollection of tradition and the anticipation of freedom, I do not want to abolish the difference between hermeneutics and the critique of ideology. Each has a privileged place and, if I may say so, different regional preferences: On the one hand, an attention to cultural heritages, focused most decidedly on the theory of the text; on the other hand a theory of institutions and of phenomena of domination, focused on the analysis of reifications and alienation. Insofar as each must always be regionalist in order to endow their claims to universality with a concrete character, their differences must be preserved against any conflationist tendency.⁹

Ricoeur argues that neither conflating hermeneutics and ideology critique or entirely separating them is the right approach. Rather as we invoke the rhythm of interpretation—a movement from the past—so we also must invoke the counterpoint of anticipation—a movement toward the future. Indeed at present, the question of power relations and the analysis of institutions are extremely important to consider.¹⁰

Another important role for critical theories in theological scholarship is that they help us identify the broader institutional arrangements of both theological studies and religious studies. Relations between religious studies and theological studies need to be understood through institutional arrangements and conflicts of power relations, as do the various relations within the disciplines in theological schools. Analysis, for instance, of how scholarly institutions relate to ecclesial institutions is absolutely necessary. The horizon of hermeneutical freedom is often dependent upon the relation to a particular ecclesial institution. To say it bluntly, scholars in university-based institutions may have the greatest freedom from ecclesial institutions; they may also have the most pressure from other divisions in the university to act like humanities or other professional schools. A scholar in that situation may find his or her time rarely taken up by invitations to churches or expectations that the profession will be a ministerial role model. Unless and until we understand our own institutional locations and the range of power relations within those locations, we will fail at any attempt to provide for the future of scholarship.

The second arena we must consider for the future of theological scholarship is well within the theological tradition—even the classical tradition—of Christian scholarship. This arena can be introduced through a question: Does the Christian tradition portray understanding as all the same, or does it rather offer us rich categorically different ways of understanding? If my first arena of supplementation wants to broaden our view beyond hermeneutics, this arena of supplementation wants to multiply our view. To make hermeneutics the bearer of all ways of knowing will force knowledge into a rather flat rhythm both in theological studies and in religious studies. I want to suggest that hermeneutics doesn't name all our ways of knowing in the study of religion nor do all our ways of knowing translate easily into hermeneutics. I will make my argument by way of comment on the literature and issues surrounding theological education.

In *Theologia*, Edward Farley argues against the specialization of disciplines, the technical transformation of knowledge into strategic “know-how” techniques, and the clericalization of theological education.¹¹ These factors, among others, banish the classical sense of *habitus*. Because *habitus* provides the unity and the rationale of the theological enterprise, theological education needs to restore *theologia* to theological education. In his second book, *The Fragility of*

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Knowledge, Farley continues the critique of modern structures of knowledge of religion, arguing that some type of *habitus* is essential to knowledge, as it is to faith itself.¹² Farley argues that hermeneutics is in some sense the key to a fuller range of knowledge, or a new *habitus*, but I want to contend that hermeneutics cannot, by itself, achieve the full range of knowledge.

Farley correctly suggests that Christianity has historically fostered a kind of knowledge as wisdom. But wisdom was and is not, I think, conveyed only by interpretation, but by participation in a range of practices that include developing intuitions, self-reflection, and practice. I am by no means the first one to make this point. As Craig Dykstra has observed, Farley tends to limit the scope of his understanding of “cognition” to linguistic and logical-mathematical realms.¹³ Howard Gardner, whom Dykstra cites, has identified seven kinds of intelligence, or what we may call ways of knowing: linguistic, musical, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, and two personal forms (that might be called feeling and intuition).

The same type of criticism can be made against David Kelsey’s constructive suggestions in *To Understand God Truly*.¹⁴ Though Kelsey draws attention to practices, when he moves to the crucial issue of transformation in theological education, his concern is mainly with disciplines. And though he accepts Farley’s aim of *habitus*, he argues that the way to achieve such reflective wisdom is to continue the types of critical thinking that have dominated modernity.

Kelsey himself suggests much more complex ways of knowing both in terms of focusing on practices and in terms of his typology of ways of understanding God in the Christian tradition. Kelsey defines practice in the way used by Alasdair MacIntyre:

any form of socially established cooperative human activity that is complex and internally coherent, is subject to standards of excellence that partly define it, and is done to some end but that does not necessarily have a product.¹⁵

As Kelsey suggests, practices are shared; they require interaction and mutual participation, and they are guided by norms of what he calls implicit rules. Kelsey maintains that practices contain ideas but also full embodied actions. Such practices hold together inner intention and outer behavior, and thus deny any systematic distinction between the spiritual/intellectual and the physical/material. Practices cannot be only interpreted, they must be enacted. Clearly, at least in most institutions of theological education we require students to engage in the practices themselves: preaching is not only understood but performed; students are queried not only about their mastery of theological hermeneutics but their religious identity and vocation.

In my recent book, *Saving Work: Feminist Practices of Theological Education*, I examine current feminist practices of theological education. Women, and many men with them, engaged in three basic practices: the creation of new narratives for themselves, the creation of new ecclesial practices, and a new sense or type of theology as critical theory of emancipatory *praxis*. In all these feminist practices, interpretation certainly took place. But other things took place as well, and knowledge was often far beyond simply cognitive ordering.

The advantage of focusing on the practices of a specific movement within theological education is that it both requires and allows a fuller range of forms of knowing. To focus on practices shifts the educational gaze, so to speak, away from the gap between ideas and their applications and causes us to look at how persons are already engaged in a set of practices in and through which they are always constructing and organizing ideas. Feminist practices as social activities require us to be sensitive to “knowing” as an intersubjective and embodied process; knowing appeals to an anthropology that is both communal and physical.

Feminist theorists of education have often pointed out that “knowing” for women has to be understood in terms of physical presence, relationships with students and faculty, and connections between feelings and ideas. The book *Women’s Ways of Knowing* identifies the following kinds of knowledge: received, subjective (in terms of the inner voice and the quest for self), procedural (reason as separated and connected knowing), and constructed.¹⁶ The authors suggest that dominant models of education hinder women’s process of education because the educational models continue to be based on modern assumptions of epistemology. The text then offers some suggestions for conceiving knowledge and education in relation to the educational practices of women. Likewise, Patricia Hill Collins in *Black Feminist Thought* develops what she calls an “Afrocentric feminist epistemology” based on the practices of concrete experience as a criterion of meaning, the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims, the ethic of caring, and an ethic of accountability.¹⁷

This issue of different forms and ways of knowing certainly extends across the range of disciplines. This is not a choice between religious studies or theological studies, indeed many scholars in religious studies can talk more about spiritual disciplines, including how to do them, than some theologians teaching in Christian seminaries. Some of my colleagues who study Eastern religions question the suitability of hermeneutics to name adequate scholarship of Eastern religious practices. Nor is it necessary to argue that hermeneutics is only one way of knowing in either religious studies or theological studies. Rather I want to suggest that various modes or ways of knowing are irreducible to hermeneutics. There is an excess of otherness, a non-translatibility between

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hermeneutics and performance, or hermeneutics and spirituality, or even hermeneutics and folklore.

I will label this the appeal for a meta-theory of rhetoric: the basic impetus and sensibility of the rhetorical attitudes, and the ability to recognize and respect various forms of knowledge operative within specific local communities, and the ability to trace the multiple ways of knowing within the ongoing transformation of communal practices. Rhetoric, of course, is the art of deliberation, persuasion, and transformation in relation to communal practices. As the art of determining that which can be other, rhetoric implies an openness to multiplicity, ambiguity, and transformation. Especially in the Roman tradition, the tradition that has most influenced thinkers such as Augustine and Calvin, rhetoric is that form of understanding that is aimed at action. In this tradition textual inquiry serves action and not vice versa. Framing our scholarship in terms of rhetoric would help us explore diverse ways of knowing and criteria specific to the range of knowing. Rhetoric, because of its dialogical, communal, and imaginative character, might also enable us to develop networks of partial connections between quite distinct ways of knowing.

Feminist Gifts to an Engaged Fallibilistic Pluralism

In sum, then, hermeneutics is important and does name a basic activity, but to use hermeneutics to name the content of all that we do masks, hides, or simply ignores important other areas of our reality that must be accounted for. Some of this masking will keep us from all the pleasures and riches of study, some will cover up helpful tools, and some will blind us to distortions in the interpretations themselves.

Because throughout this essay I have relied heavily upon the work of Richard Bernstein to frame the importance of finding new ways to live with difference and use it for a new reality of the common good, let me invoke one more notion from Bernstein. Bernstein observes that our present situation is characterized by “a new intellectual mood of fluidity and breaking down of boundaries.”¹⁸ The traditional boundaries in the academy are not as fixed as we once perceived them to be. We who study religion might say that many of the disciplines are beginning to look more like the conglomerate that religious studies and theological studies have always been, that is the bringing together of a variety of disciplines and counter-disciplinary approaches to address a subject matter. As Bernstein suggests there are real dangers in this pluralistic situation, for such pluralism can become fragmenting, where we only can communicate with our own small group. Or the pluralism can become flabby, where we just poach across the other orientations. Yet another option is to

engage in polemical pluralism where we refuse to really engage in other positions. And there can be just mere tokenism, or defensive pluralism where we never engage because we assume we cannot learn from other positions.

Bernstein argues instead the necessity for what he calls an *engaged fallibilistic pluralism*. The task is primarily an ethical rather than merely a cognitive or linguistic one. The task before us now is to “take our fallibilism seriously,” to listen to others: other religions, other ways of knowing, other persons:

It means being vigilant against the dual temptations of simply dismissing what others are saying by falling back on one of those standard defensive ploys where we condemn it as obscure, wooly, or trivial, or thinking we can always easily translate what is alien into our entrenched vocabularies.¹⁹

So, Bernstein argues, our task is to be engaged constantly in a process of networking around our commonalities and our differences. We will engage in conflict and disagreement, and our common life will be fragile and in need of continual tending. This will require hermeneutical skill, and in this I agree with Browning. But the hermeneutical skill required will be one that is supplemented by the skills of critical theory and rhetoric, and thus refuses to assume or need a common, essential theory underneath or behind all work.

Bernstein is correct, in my judgment, in suggesting that the task before us is also a communal and ethical task. We must learn to live together in new ways. And while I agree with Browning that the nature and criteria of scholarship must be addressed through theoretical and epistemological concerns, I also think that the present situation is one that must be addressed by working together to cultivate communities of diversity: diversity among peoples, traditions, and scholarly methods. From a feminist perspective, I think we must resist any one meta-theory to adjudicate all claims. One of the most promising contributions of feminism is not only its insistence on equality and specificity of the variety of women, but also its moral and epistemological work of how to fit together categorical differences, how to live in community and in the world in the context of an engaged fallibilistic pluralism. Feminist theology, as I understand it, offers us certain values and leading principles that may help us to live together where we form fragile and rich connections and networks. Feminist theology has the capacity to cultivate in us three important leading principles and intellectual values: the first I will call a presumed awareness of difference and the need to cultivate empathy; the second is the sensitivity to emergent possibilities and the cultivation of imagination, the third I will call a vision of justice and the need to cultivate an epistemological ethic. I do not think these are unique to feminist

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theology, nor do I think that any of us has to defend our presence within scholarship by claims of uniqueness. Indeed, I think these values and principles within feminism are important because other forms of scholarship can connect with them, and by exploring the commonalities and differences create the kind of community of scholarship for which I am calling. That is to say, the *content* of our scholarship can parallel the *context* of our scholarship as we explore our own contributions to diversity and compassion, emergent possibility and imagination, and justice and ethics.

1. *A presumed awareness of difference and the need to cultivate empathy.* In the 1960s feminist theology emerged within academic circles of Jewish and Christian theology. These early feminist theologians identified “woman’s” experience as different from man’s experience. They criticized the assumption that male experience was all experience and explored what it might mean to do theology from a woman’s perspective.

At the same time feminist theology was raising questions about the limits of theology developed out of only men’s experience, blacks and Latin Americans were criticizing theology as done from a white perspective. Within feminist theology the questions of a hegemonic approach to even “women’s” experience soon exploded. Are all women’s experiences the same? What about African American women who bear the triple jeopardy of race, class, and sex? What about Spanish-speaking women who do not share the heritage of Western, Enlightenment Christianity? What about the diversity of lesbian and bisexual women for whom being man’s “other” has not been quite the same as for heterosexual women? Feminist theology as reflecting the experiences of white, middle-class women was called into question by the experiences of African American women, of lesbians, of Hispanic American women, and of Asian American women. Feminist theology, in often ambiguous ways, came to assume the importance of difference. As feminist theology began to insist upon a presumed awareness of difference, so it also came to cultivate the intellectual value of empathy.

As Diane Tietjens Meyers has recently suggested in her book *Subjection and Subjectivity*, empathy requires the ability imaginatively to conceive of what it is like for the other.²⁰ Using one’s own past experiences is important in empathy, but that cannot be the only resource used in empathy. Experiences of oppression, injustice, and marginalization are diverse and may not be experienced by all persons in the same way. Empathy according to Meyers requires us to mobilize “our powers of attentive receptivity and analytic discernment”:

Particularly when the other's background or circumstances are very different from one's own, empathy may require protracted observation and painstaking imaginative reconstruction of the minutiae of the other's viewpoint.²¹

The first leading principle and intellectual form feminism begins with is seeing difference and trying imaginatively to construct the world from a point of view different from one's own.

2. *The second leading principle has to do with a sensitivity to emergent possibility and a cultivation of imagination.* Both critical theories and rhetoric foreground transformation by focusing on emergent possibilities. In critical theory, attention to emergent possibilities comes through giving voice to desire and hope, as well as analyzing the personal, cultural, and structural possibilities for change. In rhetoric, transformation is at the heart of reflection and expression in that rhetoric consists of determining that which can be other. In a time in which the issues facing the nature and criteria of scholarship are issues of building community as well as multiplying theoretical frameworks, it is necessary to emphasize the cultivation of the imagination.

There are many ways to demonstrate this leading principle in feminist theology: the insistence of the historicization of the tradition (the failure to assume the tradition really says the same thing), the emphasis on reconstruction of theology as local and practical activity, the exploration with new liturgies, new and imaginative appropriation of Scripture.

Feminist theologies tend to emphasize imagination by seeking to recognize unrealized possibilities in various situations. Feminist theologies are thus replete with calls to the imagination, such as the one from Marjorie Procter-Smith, "Anamnesis for women requires the creation of feminist imagination, which permits women to appropriate the past and to envision the future." Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has suggested that an important step in biblical hermeneutics and in theological education is the creative visualization of text. Sallie McFague, Rita Nakashima Brock, and Rosemary Radford Ruether have all modeled what it is to imagine new symbols and new meanings for symbols of God.

What feminist theology contributes as a value and principle to the scholarly community is the emphasis on the imagination as an academic tool. Feminist theology, in a certain sense, foregrounds the role of imagination in hermeneutics, in critical theory, and in rhetoric. In hermeneutics, feminist theologians have been interested in the possibility of new interpretations of theological symbols and theological doctrines. In critical theory, feminist theologians have criticized the patriarchy of Christian tradition in order to anticipate new possibilities for anthropology, community, and society. And in rhetoric, feminist theologians

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have attended to women's relational ways of knowing, the importance of embodiment/disembodiment for knowing, and the role of liturgy, including new liturgical forms, in theology. If, as I have suggested, the task before us is to live together through an engaged fallibilistic pluralism, we will need to explore and cultivate the imagination as a necessary tool of not only scholarship but of life together.

3. *The third leading principle is a vision of justice and the need to cultivate an epistemological ethic.* Central to the concern of how to live in a multicultural and multidisciplinary academy, with its struggles of knowledge, power, and interest, is a commitment to a vision of justice. Justice involves deliberation, representation, and construction within each and every community. Justice means that everyone gets a voice in self-determination and that everyone has the resources necessary for his or her communal and individual self-determination. The scholarly community should not just talk about justice, it should constitute itself through justice. Because the academic community has, like all other institutions, arenas of struggle over the relations of power, interest, and knowledge, politics must be cared for. A basic question, once we have accepted that knowledge is constructed through politics, is whether or not we become responsible for justice. Justice, according to the feminist theorist Iris Marion Young, names the process and relationship of community:

For a norm to be just, everyone who follows it must in principle have an effective voice in its consideration and be able to agree without coercion. For a social condition to be just, it must enable all to meet their needs and exercise their freedom; thus justice requires that all be able to express their needs.²²

If this is true, the intellectual value of justice will and must be cultivated. And, among other things, the ethics of epistemology will have to be investigated, respected, and nurtured. This is another point where I worry about the sole reliance on hermeneutics—a theory rather notorious for placing ethics in a secondary mode.

Time and space limit me from elaborating these leading principles and intellectual values we can receive from feminist theology. Let me, then, conclude by summarizing my argument. This essay has affirmed the role of hermeneutics and argued that hermeneutics, if taken alone as the adjudicator of conflict and opposition, limits too much the necessary field of vision. When we supplement hermeneutics with critical theory and rhetoric to name other, perhaps even more contested, arenas in our life together, we arrive at the need for an engaged fallibilistic pluralism. Or, as I have tried to say more metaphorically, it is necessary to have rhythm, but not fully sufficient. It is necessary to recognize

that we are eating together but not sufficiently to the full range of all the institutional, symbolic, and political activities of our feasting together. Furthermore, I have suggested that hermeneutics cannot bear the weight of the intellectual inquiry into our work. Indeed, as perhaps what is more implicit in my argument, no one theory can explain or account for what we do. This does not lead us into the chablis of complete relativism. The only option is neither common essence nor complete relativism. Rather, I have suggested an alternative, pragmatic view, of cultivating values that allows us to not only live with difference, but to be enriched by difference. I have suggested a focus on shaping new intellectual values that allow us to live in a multicultural and perhaps a particular type of postmodern time. We will have to give up the quest for absolute clarity and sameness, but we will be enriched by many new witnesses of intellectual truth.

ENDNOTES

1. See Browning's essay in this volume, 2.
2. Richard Bernstein, *The New Constellation: The Ethical-Political Horizons of Modernity/Postmodernity* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1992), 8.
3. Rebecca S. Chopp, *Saving Work: Feminist Practices of Theological Education* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1995), 22-29.
4. I borrow the term "new constellation" from Richard Bernstein in his recent *The New Constellation*. Constellation allows us to speak of a combination of diverse elements that attempt to generate both new values and new epistemological lenses. I agree with Bernstein's explanation of his preference for this metaphor: "The reason why I find this metaphor so fertile is because I want to show that our 'modern/postmodern' situation or predicament is one that defies and resists any and all attempts of reduction to 'a common denominator, essential core, or generative first principle.' Constellation is deliberately intended to displace Hegel's master metaphor of *Aufhebung*."
5. Martin Jay, *Adorno* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 14. Cited in Bernstein, *A New Constellation*, 8 and 201.
6. Some feminist theologians argue that feminist theology appropriately expresses the real or true meaning of Christian tradition. Other feminist theologians argue that tradition can be internally critiqued for feminist ends, while still others resist the method of assuming some notion of Christian tradition as the central authority.
7. Leading principles function as guides for deliberation but can themselves be revised as demanded by continued inquiry. Not as static as ontological structure and not as formal as methodological rules, leading principles combine the substance of values with the guiding character of orienting principles. Leading principles orient us to the basic values through which we see and value the world.
8. Paul Ricoeur, "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology," *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, ed. and trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 63-100.
9. *Ibid.*, 100.

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10. I question Professor Browning's insistence on the privileging of the Western tradition in religious studies and in theological studies. The problem with the notion of privileging is the failure to take seriously Christianity itself as a non-Western tradition as well as the failure to take seriously the importance of the current global situation of life, even life in the academy. Further, the language of privileging may also blind us to Christianity's contribution to the distortion of other religions and regions of the world.
11. Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983).
12. Edward Farley, *The Fragility of Knowledge: Theological Education in the Church and the University* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988).
13. Craig Dykstra, "Reconceiving Practice," in *Shifting Boundaries: Contextual Approaches to the Structure of Theological Education*, eds. Barbara G. Wheeler and Edward Farley (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1991), 65-66.
14. David H. Kelsey, *To Understand God Truly: What's Theological About a Theological School* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992).
15. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981). Kelsey cites MacIntyre in *To Understand God Truly*, 118.
16. Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, and Jill Mattuck Tarule, *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 1986).
17. Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), 206-20.
18. Bernstein, *A New Constellation*, 335.
19. Ibid.
20. Diana Tietjens Meyers, *Subjection and Subjectivity: Psychoanalytic Feminism and Moral Philosophy* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994).
21. Ibid., 33.
22. Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 34.

A Brief Response

Don Browning

In the essays presented in this volume, members of the ATS Council on Theological Scholarship and Research have, in effect, spread before the theological public a generous serving of our ongoing conversations about the nature of scholarship within the context of theological education. We do not offer conclusions. My own article was designed to stimulate responses, and, indeed, responses I received.

But for our exchange to be as useful as possible, I will add some final clarifications and defenses.

First, it should be noted that several of the papers generally affirmed the usefulness of hermeneutic philosophy for the clarification of theological scholarship in its various genres and in its relation to religious studies. Several papers affirmed that the tension between religious and theological studies is a proper location for giving a justification for theological scholarship and the interrelated character of its various subdisciplines.

A generally favorable hearing for hermeneutic philosophy as a tool for achieving these clarifications should not come as a surprise. Hermeneutic theory, in one way or another, has been used with some success by several contributors to the current discussion—notably the essays and books of Francis Fiorenza, Edward Farley, David Tracy, and others. I too offer hermeneutic philosophy as a *tool* for clarifying such issues as the relation of theological to religious studies, objectivity to commitment, and theory to practice. But hermeneutic philosophy is just that—a *tool*. Hermeneutic theory is not what we preach in theological education; it is not the gospel. It, however, may prove to be a fruitful intellectual resource for the philosophical defense of theological studies and for defining the proper task of religious studies.

It should be noted, and reemphasized, that I do not write about hermeneutics as such; I propose the usefulness of “critical” hermeneutics. Several responses overlooked what the addition of “critical” to “hermeneutics” means for the critique of power and the nature of ethics. I will amplify this point below.

In spite of the openness to hermeneutic philosophy on the part of my critics, there were concerns and criticisms. Rather than discussing these concerns paper by paper, I will address common issues that ran through several of them.

First, there were concerns about the exact meaning of the metaphors of “distance” and “belonging” and whether this distinction could clarify fully the relation between religious and theological studies. Peter Phan brings up this

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issue with particular force. Specifically, he understands me to say that the degree of distancing from a prior cultural belonging is what alone distinguishes religious and theological studies. He believes that I hold that this distancing is only a matter of “degrees.” I actually say that the difference between scholarship in religious studies and theological education is the “degree and kind of epistemological distance they each achieve.” The word “kind” signals a point that emerges later in the same paragraph. The epistemological distance achieved by both religious and theological studies is relative to various pre-understandings, presuppositions, and, indeed, faith assumptions that each enterprise may hold. The distance theological studies achieves is relative to a prior assumption—“that the Christian tradition has brought insight and wisdom—indeed revelation—to the human predicament.” It is not just degree of aspired-for distance, it is also a kind of background assumption. Yet, neither the degree of distance nor kind of background assumption is categorically different between religious and theological studies. Religious studies has its faith assumptions. Indeed, I concede Peter Phan’s point that the extent to which theology acknowledges and tests its pre-understandings—its faith assumptions—it may well achieve, in spite of the pretensions of religious studies toward objectivity, higher degrees of distancing.

There is the related issue of the meaning of “belonging.” Ellen Leonard makes the interesting remark that many women in Catholic theological education do not feel that they belong. They feel that their tradition has excluded them. And this, I acknowledge, is in some respects true. But this is not quite the meaning of belonging that Ricoeur has in mind. Belonging in hermeneutic theory does not refer to degrees of inclusion or degrees of acceptance and affirmation; it refers to the depth of influence that a tradition has on subsequent generations. These women who feel alienated from their Catholic heritage, nevertheless, have still been influenced deeply by it. Their presence in theological education suggests that they are there to understand it—understand it, indeed, for the purposes of practical reconstruction. My point is that both theological education and religious studies should support that understanding and reconstructive process.

Second, Peter Phan, George Schner, and Walter Kaiser believe that I fail to acknowledge what makes theological studies unique, i.e., its focus on God, transcendence, and revelation. I acknowledge that I do not make this point as vigorously as they would like. But I do assert it. The object of theological studies is the pre-understanding that Christianity carries a unique “insight and wisdom—indeed revelation.” Because my strategy is to argue for the rough analogy of background assumptions between theology and religious studies, for rhetorical reasons I represent the assumptions of theology in less confessional and

explicit terms. I am, by using this softer language, attempting to sneak the camel into the skeptic's tent. But if I am correct that humanistic studies of all kinds, including religious studies, have their assumptions, then I have earned the right for Phan, Schnier, and Kaiser to be more robust in articulating the assumptions behind their scholarship, i.e., assumptions about the reality of God, the divine, the transcendent. But, according to this model, such a right belongs to their theological scholarship only if they, in turn, are willing to submit such language to further critical analysis.

Third, several respondents—Phan, Jung Young Lee, and Preston Williams—are concerned about my assertion that the first responsibility of both religious *and* theological studies is to gain critical self-understanding of the effective history (religious and nonreligious) of the forms of life and institutions that constitute North American culture and society—the context of theological education addressed by ATS. They believe there is in this approach a privileging of the West. It makes them nervous to assert this at the very moment when marginalized racial and non-Western voices—African American, Asian, Hispanic, women, and minorities of all kinds—are demanding to be heard. This is an important point. But I do not recant.

The point is not to privilege Western religious and philosophical sources *in the end*. The point is to say we must understand, *to begin with*, what has formed us. We must understand our effective history. Indeed, we must gain a “critical” understanding of this history—understand its distortions, embeddedness in power, its partiality—but understand it nonetheless. We must understand how our religious heritages (an intermingling of Jewish, Christian, Greek, Roman, Egyptian, Germanic, and later African American, Asian) have influenced the shape of our institutions—legal, educational, medical, financial, governmental, democratic, etc. If the adjective “Western” raises suspicions, then it can be dropped. The emphasis is not on Western as such and certainly not on Western domination or hegemony; the emphasis is on understanding, for the purposes of practical reconstruction, the effective history of the culture, forms of life, and institutions that have shaped us. Enhancing our practical understanding of this effective history is the first task of theological studies; it is the first task of religious studies as well.

Furthermore, the position I represent is not against, or even neglectful of, studying other cultures and religions or the way they have, or are presently, becoming a part of our effective history. I say, rather, that when “we study a phenomenon totally outside our cultural tradition, we study it partially in light of that to which we belong from our own effective history . . .” If this is true, it helps to have some idea of where we come from before we study “the other.” What I am objecting to are religious studies programs that will hire advocates

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and practitioners of Buddhism, Hinduism, and other religions (which is a fine thing to do) but feel compromised hiring a theologian who is trying to gain critical purchase on Christianity in either its Protestant or Catholic forms. Furthermore, I challenge theological education to do something that it presently just does not do to any significant degree. Note that I write, "The critical study of religious traditions other than Judaism, Christianity, and Islam is part of the obligation of both religious studies and theological education." To begin with the effective history of the North American context of theological education is not to exclude other religious traditions, histories, and perspectives.

Finally, there is a strong concern that a hermeneutical perspective does not itself provide for a critique of power. Rebecca Chopp and Preston Williams express this point with vigor. I remind my critics, however, that I do not write only about "hermeneutics." I propose, instead, Ricoeur's "critical" hermeneutics which integrates the critical theory of Habermas into the larger hermeneutical theory of Gadamer. Throughout the paper, and especially in my fourth proposition, I call for a "critical understanding" of our effective history. It is precisely the point of critical theory to try to uncover power investments, ideology, and other distortions. Critical hermeneutic theory, in contrast to Enlightenment critical theories, does this out of acknowledging a prior belonging to the traditions it also critiques.

In short, Chopp's use of Richard Bernstein and Paul Ricoeur and her attempt to find a middle path between objectivism and relativism, in Bernstein's sense of these terms, is very close indeed to the agenda I am pursuing.

There are many additional points which could be addressed, but these, I believe, are the main issues raised in our discussions. I hope that the readers of *Theological Education*, in overhearing our exchanges, have gained a better map of some of the issues relevant to defining the nature, dignity, and unity of theological scholarship and research in its descriptive, historical, theological, and strategic forms.